



Ascending the Steps to Hliðskjálf

The Cult of Óðinn in Early Scandinavian Aristocracy

Joshua Rood

Lokaverkefni til MA-gráðu í Norrænni trú

Félagsvísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Abstract

Ascending the Steps to Hliðskjálf: The Cult of Óðinn in Early Scandinavian Aristocracy

This thesis is a study of the cult of Óðinn as it seems to have evolved within the newly emerging warrior-based aristocracy of southern Scandinavia during the centuries prior to the Viking Age. By approaching sources critically and focusing on archaeological evidence, it looks specifically at how the deity developed within the said milieu and at the uses his cult may have served for those who worshipped him. It subsequently seeks to address other related questions such as when Óðinn came to become associated with warrior-kings in Scandinavia, where this seems to have occurred, and how it might have happened, including an examination of the social and political influences that might have been involved in the development. By means of this process, the study attempts to provide contextual insight into the relationship that seems to have existed between rulers and religion in pre-Christian southern Scandinavia. As is well known, the later medieval literary sources often portray Óðinn as being the ultimate sovereign, ruling over other gods and earthly rulers alike. This thesis attempts to shed some new light on the centuries prior to these accounts, offering a model of an earlier manifestation of the god who would become the “alföðr”.

Útdráttur

Uppgangan að Hliðskjálf: Óðinsdýrkun í árdaga norræns aðals

Þessi rannsókn tekur til Óðinsdýrkunar innan nýtilkominnar aðalsstéttar suður-Skandinavíu á öldunum fram að víkingaöld. Með gagnrýnni nálgun á heimildir og áherslu á fornleifar verður einblínt á hvernig goðið þróaðist í því umhverfi og hvaða þörfum átrúnaður á Óðin fullnægði. Næst verður leitast við að svara spurningum á borð við "hvenær" tengsl Óðins við stríðsherra Skandinavíu urðu til, "hvar" það virðist helst hafa gerst, og "hvernig" það kann að hafa gerst, með tilliti til þeirra félagslegu og pólitísku þátta sem höfðu áhrif á þá þróun. Um leið mun rannsóknin gera tilraun til að skýra samhengið í sambandi höfðingja og trúar í suður-Skandinavíu fyrir kristnitöku. Að lokum, í ljósi þess að miðaldaheimildir lýsa Óðni oft sem hinum fullkomna einvaldi sem ríkir yfir öðrum goðum sem og jarðneskjum höfðingjum, mun rannsóknin reyna að varpa nýju ljósi á aldirnar á undan og færa fram mynd af fyrri birtingarmynd goðsins sem síðar átti eftir að verða alföðr.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1.1 Óðinn the Allfather

Óðinn er æztr ok elztr Ásanna. Hann ræðr öllum hlutum, ok svá sem önnur guðin eru máttug, þá þjóna honum öll svá sem börn föður[...]Óðinn heitir Alföðr, þvíat hann er faðir allra goða. Hann heitir ok Valföðr, þvíat hans óskasynir eru allir þeir er í val falla. Þeim skipar hann Valhöll, ok Vingólf, ok heita þeir þá einherjar (*Gylfaginning*, p. 21).¹

Óðinn was called *Alföðr* (Allfather). He was there in the beginning, and shaped the world, and he will live forever, until the end of time.² He gave life to Askr and Embla, the oldest ancestors of mankind.³ He was the first god, the highest god, and the god who ordained other gods to rule under him. He gave them twelve *rökstólar* (judgement-seats),⁴ but the high-seat was his alone.⁵ From his seat, Hliðskjálf, set at the edge of heaven, the *alföðr* could see over all of the world.⁶ In his hall, Valhöll, thatched with shields,⁷ *Valföðr* (Father of the chosen-slain) hosted an army made up of the greatest kings, rulers, and warriors who have ever lived. All great men who died in battle came to him.⁸

¹ All references to *Gylfaginning* in this thesis refer to the text in: Snorri Sturluson (2005).

² “Lífir hann of allar alder ok stjórnar öllu ríki sínu ok ræðr öllum hlutum stórum ok smám[...]Hann smíðaði himin ok jörð ok loptin ok alla eign þeira[...]Hitt er mest er hann gerði manninn ok gaf honum önd þá er lífa skal ok aldri týnask” (*Gylfaginning*, pp. 8-9).

³ While the quote above simply credits *Alföðr* with the creation of man, elsewhere, in *Gylfaginning*, pp. 11-13, Snorri gives a different account. Here he is accompanied by two brothers, Vili and Vé. Together, Óðinn and his brothers create the world from the corpse of Ymir, and give life to the first humans, Askr and Embla. here Snorri quotes from the Eddic poem *Völuspá* (*Gylfaginning*, p. 12, *Völuspá*, st. 5) and also draws from it in his account of Askr and Embla (*Völuspá*, st. 17-18). *Völuspá*, however, presents Óðinn alongside Hœnir and Lóðr, instead of Vili and Vé. Snorri’s account of the creation of the world from the body of Ymir is not reflected in *Völuspá*, where the brothers appear to have lifted the land out of the sea (*Völuspá*, st. 4). His account here draws on the version found in the poems *Grimnismál* (st. 40), and *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 21). It appears that what Snorri is presenting is an attempt to syncretize otherwise divergent accounts. References to the Eddic poems (*Eddukvæði*) in this thesis all refer to the text in *Eddadigte*.

⁴ Named *rökstólar* in, for example, *Völuspá*, st. 6.

⁵ “[...]en hásetit þat er Alföðr á” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 15).

⁶ “Sá stendr á himins enda við brúar sporð, þar er Bifröst kemr til himins. Þar er enn mikill staðr er Valaskjálf heitir. Þann stað á Óðinn. Þann gerðu guðin ok þökkðu skíru silfri, ok þar er Hliðskjálfinn í þessum sal, þat háseti er svá heitir. Ok þá er Alföðr sitr í því sæti þá sér hann of allan heim” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 20).

⁷ “Svá segir Þjóðólfr inn hvinveski at Valhöll var skjöldum þökð” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 7).

⁸ “þat segir þú at allir þeir menn er í orrostu hafa fallit frá upphafi heims eru nú komnir til Óðins í Valhöll” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 32).

In his high seat in Valhöll, Óðinn sat flanked by two wolves, Geri and Freki, who consumed all food set before them.⁹ Two ravens, Huginn and Muninn sat on his shoulders, whispering all the news of the world in his ears.¹⁰ He had one eye, having pledged one for a drink from *Mímis brunnr* (Mímir's well) to obtain the wisdom of ancient lore.¹¹ He has a spear, Gungnir, and in the final battle he will ride ahead of his army in a golden helm and shining armor, wielding that spear.¹²

This is the description we are given of the Norse deity Óðinn by the Icelandic poet and chieftain, Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), in the mythological *Gylfaginning*, which forms a key part of his *Prose Edda*. Writing in the early thirteenth century, and drawing on both Eddic and skaldic poems, Snorri made very clear exactly what he felt about the god's position within the religion of his ancestors. As a deity, Snorri's Óðinn ruled over the *Æsir* (gods) and established the first laws among the gods. Similar ideas appear in Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* and the *Prologue* to his *Edda*, where euhemerized as a man, Óðinn is presented as a great conquering warrior from the south, and the first of the legendary Ynglingar, who established his own kingdom in Uppland¹³ in Sweden. The legendary dynasty of the Skjöldungar, ruling out of Lejre, traced their lineage back to him as the father of their founder, Skjöld, according to Snorri, and among the Swedes he was the first sovereign, who established laws and customs and was worshiped after his death as a god (*Ynglinga saga*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 15, 20-23). He was, by Snorri's reckoning, not only the king of the gods. He was also the god of kings

While, as will be shown below, Snorri's accounts should always be treated critically,¹⁴ many of the characteristics that he ascribes to Óðinn are reflected in the remaining corpus of written material from which we derive our synthesis of the religion of heathen Scandinavia.¹⁵ These sources are comprised of the anonymous body of poems that we refer collectively to as *Eddukvæði*, and fragments of skaldic poetry, which arguably go back to the Viking Age itself,

⁹ “Þá vist er á hans borði stendr gefr hann tveim úlfum er hann á, er svá heita: Geri ok Freki.” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 32).

¹⁰ “Hrafnar tveir sitja á ǫxlum honum ok segja í eyru honum ǫll tíðindi þau er sjá eða heyra. Þeir heita svá: Huginn ok Muninn” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 32).

¹¹ “Þar kom Alfǫðr ok beiddisk eins drykkjar af brunnum, en hann fékk eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 17).

¹² “Ríðr fyrstr Óðinn með gullhjálmi ok fagra brynju ok geir sinn er Gungnir heitir” (*Gylfaginning*, p. 50).

¹³ *Ynglinga saga* in *Heimskringla* I, pp. 11-16. References to the books contained in *Heimskringla* refer to the text in: Snorri Sturluson (1941-51). Snorri says that Óðinn set up his personal residency at Sigtuna. Uppsala, the supposed seat of the Ynglingar, is just 20 kilometers north of Sigtuna.

¹⁴ See, for example, Gunnell, 2015, pp. 55-56; DuBois, 1999, pp. 7-8, 10-12, 56-59; N. Price, 2002, pp. 26, 54-55; Abram, 2011, pp. 207-221; Andrén, 2007, pp. 105-138; Brink, 2007, pp. 105-135; and Fabeck & Näsman, 2013.

¹⁵ In this thesis, the word “heathen” will be used to refer to the pre-Christian people and practices in the Nordic countries.

as well as various pseudo-historical and legendary sagas. These various sources portray him not only as a ruler, but also as a god of poetry, praised and heralded by skalds as the source of their craft,¹⁶ and a god of magic who knew the runes and gave them to men. He could fetter armies, heal wounds, raise the dead, and calm storms.¹⁷ He could appear as an old wanderer to test men, and dole out rewards and his favor, or take them away (see the prose introduction and conclusion to *Grímnismál*, and *Grímnismál*, st. 3; and *Völsunga saga* chs. 3, 11).¹⁸ Óðinn was clearly a god with many roles, and who had many masks.

Behind all of his complexities, however, the Óðinn that we are presented with in the written material is always a god of kings, elite aristocrats, and of their sport: war (see Chapter 4). It was Óðinn who chose who won and who lost in battle, and who lived and who died. His *valkyrjur* swarmed over the battlefield, confusing warriors, freezing muscles, and taking those whom he had claimed for his hall.¹⁹ Throughout skaldic poetry, ravens and eagles are depicted feasting on fallen high-born warriors. The poetry often specifically connects these birds to Óðinn.²⁰ Multiple preserved poems from the tenth century dedicated to such rulers back these ideas up, regularly stressing the importance of their relationship with Óðinn.²¹ This idea was something that was so deeply rooted that even the Christian king, Hákon góði, is described in *Hákonarmál* as grudgingly joining Óðinn in Valhöll after his death (see *Hákonar saga góða*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 196-197).

1.1.2 Approaching the Past: Previous Approaches and Perspectives

Whether it is on the basis of his role as sovereign god, or as that of the god of kings, the connection between Óðinn and rulership seems to have become entrenched in the late Viking Age and in later medieval material. We can say with some certainty that on a general level these depictions noted above reflect a great deal of truth about how Óðinn was perceived, at least by

¹⁶ See, for example, *Skáldskaparmál*, pp. 11-13; *Ynglinga saga*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-1951, I, p. 17; and *Hávamál*, sts 104-107. All references to *Skáldskaparmál* in this thesis refer to the text in: Snorri Sturluson, 1998.

¹⁷ *Hávamál*, sts 147, 148, 154, 157; and *Ynglinga saga*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-1951, I, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 1906-1908, pp. 6-7, 25-26.

¹⁹ See Price, 2002, pp. 331-346; *Darraðarljóð*, sts 3, 6 in *Njáls saga*, pp. 454-458; and *Hákonarmál*, sts 1, 8 in *Hákonar saga góða*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-1951, I, pp. 196-197.

²⁰ Skaldic poetry does not shy away from the fact that the eagles and ravens that feast on the dead belong to Óðinn. See for example, *Háleygjatál*, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, 2012, I, st. 11: “Ok Sigurð/ hinns svönum veitti hróka/ bjór Haddingja/ vals Farmatýs/ fjörvi næmðu/ Jarðráðendr á Öglói”.

²¹ See for example, *Háleygjatál*, *Hákonarmál*, and *Eiríksmál*, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, 2012, I, pp. 195-212, 171-194, 1003-1013. All references to these poems, unless otherwise stated, refer to *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, 2012.

certain groups of people in the late Viking Age and during the centuries that followed. But what about during the centuries prior to this? As will be discussed in Chapter 2, myth and religion change over time. And while the writings of a thirteenth-century Icelandic may well reflect a great deal of truth about his personal perceptions of past beliefs, or even the perceptions that other members of his society had of the past, they do not necessarily reflect a past reality itself or the perceptions of other areas or people.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the question of Scandinavian pre-history was difficult. In spite of their contextual difficulties that they present, the Icelandic textual sources remained the primary resource for studying Scandinavian pre-history, including religion (N. Price, 2002, pp. 53-54; Andrén, 2007, p. 106). Among other things, it was considered “more or less impossible” to study religious practice in Scandinavia during those periods or in places which were not described in written material (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 55). As a consequence, the later Icelandic sources were approached first, sometimes supplemented with other written texts,²² and then used retrospectively to describe the Viking Age itself and the time before it (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 55). The obvious distances in time and space, particularly between the time at which the literary sources were recorded and those periods that preceded the Viking Age, were often neglected. The heterogeneous societies and religiosities of pre-historic Scandinavia were consequentially often depicted as part of a homogenized picture of “the Norsemen”. Archaeology, meanwhile, was treated in a passive sense used to confirm the texts, and as a source for illustrations (Andrén, 2007, p. 106).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, however, a number of social and technological innovations have taken place in and around the various fields concerned with the study of Old Norse religion which have resulted in researchers today being much more capable of approaching Scandinavian pre-history on its own terms, so to speak. Increasingly, religious history researchers, philologists, and archaeologists have begun to place more emphasis on a critical analysis of source materials that were previously not emphasized by earlier researchers (N. Price, 2002, pp. 53-54). The study of religion in pre-historic Scandinavia has also become much more interdisciplinary, particularly since the 1980s, combining expertise from various departments such as archaeology, literature, folkloristics, philology, place-name studies and the history of religion, simultaneously expanding communication between facilities inside and

²² For example, Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*, and the accounts of German, Roman, and Anglo-Saxon writers (see Chapter 6.1.)

outside of Scandinavia.²³ Religion in heathen Scandinavia thus ceased to be treated as theology and was approached more on the basis of a multiplicity of rituals, myths and traditions extending through a variety of overlapping social and geographic spheres and time periods (see Andrén, 2007, pp. 106-107; 2013, pp. 31-33; and Bell, 2009).

In general, the advent of post-processualism in the field of archaeology in the 1980s brought about a radical change in the way in which both archaeologists and historians treated the relationship between artifacts and textual sources. Both texts and material remains began to be treated equally as products of the human imagination which, along with rituals, served to define and create social relationships. Both needed to be approached with an emphasis on contextual analysis (see, for example, N. Price, 2002, pp. 28-29; Moreland, 2001, 77-98; and Hodder, 1991). Technological advances also led to a dramatic increase in the number and range of archaeological finds which, coupled with critical topographic and place-name research, have allowed for religion and society to be studied systemically by showing how places, events, and objects in the landscape worked together. These developments have given researchers the ability to study concepts of continuity and change within pre-historic societies more definitively than previously (see Andrén, 2013; Fabech & Näsman, 2013, pp.55; and Chapter 3.2. of this thesis).

One result of these advances is that in recent years, an increasing number of researchers of archaeology and religious history have been able to show with some confidence (using archaeological evidence) that gradual transformations regularly took place over time in Scandinavia, and especially between the fourth and eighth centuries, during which Nordic society gradually developed from being a decentralized, tribal society into one made up of larger and larger kingdoms, and eventually nation states (see, for example, Hedeager, 1992; Näsman, 1998, pp. 103-121; and Fabech, 1991). Within this process of stratification, it has been suggested that we can see the gradual emergence of a new elite milieu comprised of warrior rulers and their elite warriors in the upper tiers of society. This aristocratic milieu would eventually materialize in the later Icelandic sagas in the shape of the kings and jarls of Scandinavia, who, as noted above, early Nordic medieval writers like Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus associated so strongly with the figure of Óðinn.

If we return to Óðinn and the prose and poetic descriptions of the god given above, it is clear that they relate to the god as he was understood between the eleventh and thirteenth

²³ See, for example, Andrén, 2007, p. 107; Brink, 1996, pp. 238-239; and Andrén, Jennbert & Raudvere, 2006, pp. 9-10. See also Chapter 3.2.

centuries, and most particularly in Iceland and western Norway. Even if they claim, as Snorri does, to describe earlier periods of time, they are still inherently late products. As noted above, they reflect how their authors wished to portray the past, and, to a lesser extent, they tell us what perceptions of the past the late, learned Christian society in which they were penned in might have had of the past. They are of limited value, however, as a source for understanding religion and society in periods earlier than themselves, or in locations beyond western Scandinavia. They can tell us very little about the Óðinn of centuries prior to the end of the Viking Age, including how he was perceived and worshipped, or by whom. They can tell us even less about how he developed over time.

As noted above, Snorri Sturluson and other saga writers and medieval historians regularly demonstrate that they believed that rulers were associated with Óðinn during the Viking Age. The multiplicity of the accounts, which consistently support this idea, suggest that it was likely the case, at least during the period in question. It needs to be remembered, however, that the Viking Age was only a short, dynamic period in the grand scheme of things. The accounts in question leave us wondering why and how Óðinn should have come to be seen as the god of rulers, and whether this was always the case. If it was not (as seems likely), then there is reason to consider when the change came about, and what caused it. If Scandinavian society was developing into one in which warrior kings associated with Óðinn sat at the top of large kingdoms, there is good reason to consider whether their apparent belief in Óðinn played a role in this process.

1.1.3 Thesis Methodology and Objectives

This thesis will address the questions noted above by focusing on the archaeological evidence for the development of an elite warrior milieu in Scandinavia, alongside the early evidence for the conceptual existence of Óðinn, and will attempt to analyze the potential relationship between the two. The extant material will be approached critically, an emphasis being placed on cultural context. The objective is to deduce as emic a model as possible, analyzing the central role that Óðinn seems to have played in the development of the elite warrior milieu. The thesis will thus address the key questions noted above, including those of “when” Óðinn came to be associated with warrior kings in Scandinavia, “where” this seems to have occurred, and how the process might have developed. Hopefully the result will provide some small contribution to the current discussions about the nature of rulership and religions in Iron Age Scandinavian

society, and particularly the ways in which these religions developed over time and in space. It is also hoped that it will exemplify how modern researchers can approach subjects that are not covered to any large degree by the extant written material.

Hopefully this process will shed some new light on the murky pre-history of Scandinavia in centuries before the poems of the *Eddukvæði* were composed, in a time when the mighty halls of Lejre and Uppsala were being constructed by the men who would become the legendary Ynglingar and Skjöldingar; a time in which an earlier manifestation of the god named Óðinn was yet to ascend to his throne on the edge of heaven, and become the *alfǫðr* that we know today from Snorri's works.

1.1.4 Thesis Structure

This introductory chapter has introduced the figure of Óðinn in his most recognizable role as the god of warriors, kings, poets and magicians, noting that this is the way in which he most commonly appears in the written sources on which our synthesis of religion in heathen Scandinavia has tended to be primarily derived. It has been noted that these sources do not provide the best means of understanding how, when, where, or why the relationship between Óðinn and rulers developed, and that the overall aim of this thesis is to try and address these questions by means of a comparative analysis of the early contemporary evidence which points to a developing milieu of warrior rulers in Scandinavia, and the early evidence for the existence of a cult of Óðinn.

The introduction will be followed in Chapter 2 with a discussion of the nature of “religion” and how it functions within society, according first and foremost to those who are researchers of religion. The chapter will go on to present a general timeline of Scandinavian religious history as it is currently understood, running from the Bronze Age to the Viking Age. The objective here is to establish a basic framework within which the discourse of this thesis can operate. In broad terms, the chapter will discuss the relationship between society, rulership and religion, emphasizing the degree to which they influence one another, at the same time providing some information about the basic temporal and geographical setting with which this thesis is concerned.

Building on this foundation, Chapter 3 will then go on to discuss the state of research with regard to the relationship between rulership and religion in Scandinavia, starting with a discussion of the question of “sacral kingship” in earlier scholarship, its development as a

theory, and the difficulties it poses as a concept. The chapter will then offer an alternative, more critical approach, namely the concept of “rulership ideology” which has been developed by a number of scholars in recent years, primarily growing out of the new field of “central place research”.

Some understanding of rulership ideology and how to approach it having been established, Chapter 4 will focus on the history of research regarding Óðinn’s relationship with rulers. The intention here is to outline what has already been said about this connection, noting those arguments that are no longer congruent with the evidence that has been produced as part of recent, more critical approaches to the study of history and religion. The chapter will conclude by focusing on those more recent works which seem to fit the ideas of how social and religious change is intimately connected to rulership ideology as presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

By the start of Chapter 5, it is hoped that the reader will have attained a solid grasp of the scholarly background. Chapter 5 will then present the principal data upon which this present investigation is built. The chapter will be organized into four sections (5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4), starting with an analysis of the data relating to the Roman Iron Age and a consideration of the conclusions that can be drawn from that information. This will be followed by a similar study of the Germanic Iron Age. At the end of each of these two sections, a number of important central places will be described in detail, considering their development and the various activities that took place in them during the periods in question. The overview of central places that developed during the Germanic Iron Age is extensive, and is thus treated as its own section. At the very end of the chapter, a special section will be dedicated to those features relating to cult practice and ritual functions which have been found to be connected to the various central places covered throughout the chapter. The goal of the chapter is to create an overall factual framework which demonstrates the development of the elite milieu in question and its connection to ritual activities. It will attempt to underline when and where developments seem to have taken place, and the reasons that lie behind them, as well as noting several important characteristics about this milieu which might help us understand them better.

This examination will be followed up in Chapter 6 with an examination of the evidence for the conceptual existence of a deity who can be definitively identified as Óðinn during the period in question, examining the degree to which this evidence can be correlated with the evidence of a developing milieu of warrior aristocrats in Scandinavia. The chapter will be broken into three overlapping sections. The first segment will survey the earliest conclusive evidence for a figure named Óðinn, demonstrating where and when each piece of evidence can be placed and providing a contextual analysis of each. The second section will consider the

place-name evidence, which is useful for demonstrating the geographical distribution of a cult dedicated to Óðinn. The third and final section will be dedicated to the iconography that can be arguably related to Óðinn.

The final chapter will then attempt to draw various conclusions on the basis of the present research, offering a few open-ended theories and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2

Religion and Society in Scandinavia

2.1.1 Defining Religion

Because this thesis is concerned with the development of specific religious beliefs within a specific group of people, it is important to first establish a fundamental understanding of what exactly “religion” means within the confines of this study. John Hines has described religion at its most basic as “a human response to a perceived but intangible spirit world that coexists with the real and concrete human world” (Hines, 1997, p. 377). Ingvild Gilhus and Lisbeth Mikaelsson agree: “religion er menneskers forhold til forestillingsunivers sem kjennetegnes av kommunikasjon om og med hypotetiske guder og makter” (Gilhus & Mikaelsson, 2001, p. 29).²⁴ According to Hines, as well as Gilhus and Mikaelsson, religion is not simply a human *perception* of an “otherworld”. It is the actual human response to that perceived otherworld in the form of specific communications and negotiations. These will manifest themselves as a system of myths, taboos, prayers and rituals relating to gods, spirits, and concepts of the sacred and mundane. In other words, religion, even at its most basic level, is something which must develop as a system within a community. In fact, within the confines of this definition, religion is something which is fundamentally collective (Lewis, 1994, p. 567).

According to Émile Durkheim:

Religion is an eminently social thing. Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups (Durkheim, 1995, p. 9).

²⁴ “Religion is people's approach towards a conceptual universe and is characterized by communication about and with hypothetical gods and powers.” Unless stated otherwise, all translations are my own.

Clifford Geertz has similarly stressed the social element of religion, arguing that religion is a socially constructed system of symbols and understandings which is both shaped by and serves to shape the way its adherents view the world (Geertz, 1973, pp. 90-91).

In her revolutionary study, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Catherine Bell argued that first and foremost, ritual practice is a strategy for the construction and maintenance of certain types of power-relationships effective within particular social organizations (Bell, 2009, p. 197).²⁵ Rituals, according to Bell, reshape, and reestablish hierarchies, social structures (including the distribution of power) and create and reaffirm social solidarity within specific groups of people (Bell, 2009, p. 216). Traditions, she notes, are not created and then left to their own momentum. Even if those who are participants in them feel that they are unchanging, traditions are in fact constantly reproduced through ritual, and through this process take in new elements and discard old ones.²⁶

Fundamentally, religion is something that exists within and is shaped specifically by a community of adherents. Because of this, a religion is inevitably going to be a reflection of its society, at least on some level, and vice versa. Rituals, taboos, deities, narratives, the structure of the perceived cosmos, and the rituals that draw upon and rely on all of these, are bound to directly reflect the geographical, social, and political situation of the community within which they exist.

2.1.2 Revealed Religions Versus Ethnic Religions

Religions impact upon and reflect their given society to differing degrees. Considering such differences, researchers have established various categories for different types of religions which are based on fundamental structural elements. It is worth overviewing those differences here, in part because Western Society is steeped in one kind of religion (primarily Christianity), while the religiosities of heathen Scandinavians were, as we shall see, of a fundamentally different type of system.

²⁵ Bell also establishes that “ritual practice” needs to be treated as the multitude of ways in which human beings act within a specific culture (Bell, 2006, p. 140).

²⁶ “Ritual systems do not function to regulate or control the systems of social relations. They are the system, and an expedient rather than perfectly ordered one at that. In other words, the more or less practical organization of ritual activities neither acts upon nor reflects the social system; rather, these loosely coordinated activities are constantly differentiating and integrating, establishing and subverting the field of social relations. Hence, such expedient systems of ritualized relations are not primarily concerned with ‘social integration’ alone, in the Durkheimian sense. Insofar as they establish hierarchical social relations, they are also concerned with distinguishing local identities, ordering social differences, and controlling the contention and negotiation involved in the appropriation of symbols” (Bell, 2009, p. 130).

At their most basic, the religions of the world have been categorized into two types by religious researchers.²⁷ The first type of religions are doctrinal, text-based religions, which are also referred to as “universal religions” or “transnational religions”, or “revealed religions”. The second type are usually referred to as community based, traditional religions, also referred to as “natural”, “ethnic”, or “folk” religions. James Russell summarizes the differences between these two types of religion as earlier proposed by Gustaf Mensching and Roger Pearson as follows:

It appears that the primary sacral focus of most folk religions, including Indo-European religions, is the folk community itself. The sacrality of the community is expressed in ritual ceremonies that celebrate its relationship with its own exclusive gods and that “promote a strong sense of in-group identification and loyalty”.²⁸ In contrast, the primary sacral focus of universal religions, such as early Christianity, appears to be the salvation of the individual by access to an existence which transcends that normally associated with a biological view of human life. According to most universal religions, this existence is attainable by all mankind through initiation into a community of belief and adherence to a universal ethical code (Russell, 1994, pp. 48-49).

The most obvious examples of universal religions today are Christianity and Islam. The most basic structural elements of such universal religions are that they are doctrinal or “revealed” in a book. They are belief-based,²⁹ providing teachings intended to apply universally to all people, regardless of nation, region, or tribe, and they place an emphasis on some form of individual spiritual evolution and eventual transcendence, be it related to obtaining entrance to paradise or reaching spiritual perfection. Because these religions are codified in textual sources, they are derived from a (more or less) static source which can be referred back to by adherents. While interpretation of the content within these sources may vary, the content itself rarely does.

²⁷ See, for example, Bellah, 1969, pp. 264-265; Mensching, 1964, pp. 254-261; Steinsland, 2005, pp. 31-34; and Hultgård, 2008, p. 212.

²⁸ Here Russell refers to Pearson, 1974, p. 269.

²⁹ While not immediately relevant to the present study, the following quote by James Russell is useful for the reader to understand and keep in mind with regard to the fact that most modern researchers are inherently familiar with Christianity and thus “belief-based religions”, while not immediately familiar with folk religions: “The most common contemporary focus in informal comparative discussions of religion appears to be on belief. One Christian sect differs from another in its beliefs. Christianity differs from Judaism and Islam in its doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. An approach to comparative religion which focuses on doctrinal beliefs is certainly valid when describing the distinguishing characteristics of revealed, universal religions, and particularly forms of Christianity. Such a doctrine-centered approach is not, however, well suited to discussions of folk religions, or to comparisons of folk religions and universal religions, since folk religions tend to identify themselves primarily in an ethnocultural sense rather than in a doctrinal sense” (Russell, 1994, pp. 47-48).

As a result, world religions are more likely to shape their host society than vice versa, and social and political change may not necessarily cause much change in religious practice.

In comparison, ethnic religions exist or have existed among all people on earth and can be observed today among many tribes in the Americas, Africa, and the Pacific (Brink, 2013, pp. 34-38). This category clearly also includes the heathen religions of northern Europe before and during the process in which those regions developed from being tribal, folk societies to becoming literate, Christianized states (Steinsland, 2005, pp. 31-34). As noted above, ethnic religions are essentially community-based and tradition-focused, developing organically in a dialogue within a specific society, its natural landscape, and the perceived “unseen world” which is enmeshed within that landscape.

In such societies, the sacred and the mundane are not easily distinguished and may not even be seen as separable from one another. The land is often seen as being infused with the sacred history of the people living on it. It may, for example, contain metaphysical creation stories, such as those of a valley being formed from a god’s footprint, or a cliff being an ancient spirit turned to stone. The community sees itself as sharing the landscape with the local flora and fauna, the dwelling places of their dead ancestors, and the sanctuaries of spirits and gods. Stories and taboos are then used to explain and preserve this relationship between people, their history, and the seen and unseen landscape.³⁰ As a result, mundane farming techniques, political rituals, hunting practices, day-to-day life and interactions with the unseen go hand in hand. Mythology and history have no clear dividing line (Brink, 2013, p. 27). Law, religion, and morality similarly are entwined with traditions and taboos that serve to maintain social and (the perceived) natural order.

To sum up, if we were to compare ethnic religions with world religions, we might say that while the source of a world religion tends to be contained in a book, and impacts on society, an ethnic religion arises from and is contained within the community itself. It changes as the community does and is impacted on by the actions of those individuals and by its social, political, and natural environment. Rituals, myths, symbols and the traditions they form a part of are a reflection of a *current* given society, even when drawing on tradition and perceived ancient lore. They are a source of reinforcement for social and power-relations within that society, including social hierarchies, group-identity and the creation of new community identities.

³⁰ While, as stated above, stories, taboos and rituals are used to explain and preserve the relationship between people, the landscape, supernatural powers, and history, they are also used to explain, preserve, maintain, and create new power-relations, hierarchies and group dynamics within living communities.

2.2. A Scandinavian Pre-Historical Overview

2.2.1 The Stone Age

In recent years, researchers have pointed to various chronological patterns which they suggest demonstrate how, when, and under what influences religious belief and praxis developed in Scandinavia over time and in different areas.³¹ It is generally accepted that Scandinavian prehistory began sometime between 12500 and 7000 BC, when nomadic hunter gatherers moved in as glacial ice shelves retreated (Jones, 1984, p. 17; Schutz, 1893, pp. 1-52). What little evidence for an artistic culture that we have from this period is often found in depictions of animals, such as bear and reindeer, indicating that these animals probably played a central role in these early people's cultural and religious schema as a result of their importance to survival (Schutz, 1983, p. 55).

Towards the end of the Neolithic and Younger Stone Age (c. 4000-2000 BC), many of these nomadic societies began to domesticate plants and animals and settled into agrarian communities. This process appears to have begun in southern Scandinavia, and spread northwards (D. Price, 2015, pp.105-158; and Shetelig & Falk, 1938, pp. 33-95). Religious practice seems to have shifted accordingly from that of a hunting society dependent upon the movement of animals, towards that of an agricultural society which relied more upon the sun and weather and the tending of the earth and domestic animals (Jones, 1984, p. 18; Schutz, 1983, p. 63). Artifacts and rock art depicting wild animals such as moose, and bear ceased at this time were often replaced by depictions of horses, ships, wagons and sun symbols.³²

2.2.2 The Bronze Age

During the Bronze Age, which followed (1500 bc-500 bc), new trade routes opened up between Scandinavia and central and southern Europe which eventually allowed for the flow of new foreign goods, particularly in the form of metals, something which helped to establish the Bronze Age (1500 BC-500 BC). In this period, certain groups of people came to control trade, wealth production and distribution, something which enabled them to develop their own wealth

³¹ This is particularly true of the last couple decades as archaeological and dating methods have become more advanced. See Chapter 3.2.

³² For example, see Coles, 2005, pp. 79-80; Schutz, pp. 55, 156-170; Kaul, 1998, p. 273; 2004, p. 407; and Andrén, 2014, pp. 126-1331.

and power and caused social classes to develop. The previously more communal social structure of Scandinavian tribal society began to stratify, albeit to a lesser degree than it would in later periods (see below). Those with material wealth were naturally able to influence and even control local and regional religious traditions in their favor.

Religion during the Nordic Bronze Age has been described as a “solar religion” and this period of time has been called a “solar age” (Kaul, 1998, p. 273; and 2004, p. 407; and Andrén, 2014, p. 131) The cosmic myths reflected in artifacts of this time appear to have been centered around the daily and annual movements of the sun, which appear to have been viewed in terms of “birth, death and rebirth” (Goldhahn, 2005, p. 20). The myths may have also involved concepts related to the *dioscuri*, or “divine twins” who appear in Vedic and Classical sources and arguably spread across Europe from Anatolia.³³ Fabulous bronze instruments, ceremonial clothing and helms appear to have been used in rituals and artists or specialists appear to have spent hours pecking and re-pecking sacred images into enduring rock art.³⁴ There is also evidence of ceremonial weapons, jewelry, and goods being given as votive offerings on behalf of the upper social tiers, something that was dependent in part upon agricultural surplus, and foreign material imports (D. Price 2015, pp. 215-216; Kristiansen, 1981).

Around 500 BC, however, it seems that a new change began to take place. Trade with southern Europe had begun to suffer and the climate began to cool. The Iron Age had begun in central and southern Europe, marginalizing the importance of bronze, and as a result, its flow into Scandinavia began to cease. The political and social networks and alliances that had depended upon the exchange and use of bronze naturally also ceased to function (D. Price, 2015, p. 250). According to Flemming Kaul, the old elite faded as they lost their claim to power (Kaul, 1998, p. 110). Southern Scandinavia in general also seems to have become poorer in this period (Jones, 1984, p. 20). The Nordic Bronze Age had come to an end.

2.2.3 The Roman Iron Age and the Migration and Vendel Periods

New ritual patterns nonetheless began to emerge around the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (500 BC), underlining once again the close links between religion and society. Pottery, animal bones, and humans began to be deposited in bogs at new ritual

³³ Kaul, 1998, p. 55; and 2004, p. 80; Kristiansen & Larsson 2005, p. 262; Andrén, 2014, p. 128; and D. Price, 2015, p. 217.

³⁴ D. Price, 2015, pp. 234-236, pp. 243-245; for overviews of the rock art, see also Coles, 2005; and Lødøen & Mandt, 2005.

locations,³⁵ many of which would retain their continuity for up to a thousand years. During the period that followed, however, Scandinavia would experience a series of tremendous social and political changes.

The early to middle part of the Roman Iron Age (c. 27 BC-500 AD) in northern Europe can be described as a period of massive migrations and political conflict. This period will be covered in detail in Chapter 5, but here it is sufficient to point out that in southern Scandinavia and northern Europe, petty chiefs were struggling to establish and expand tribal power, resulting in conflicts over territory, meaning resources became common. As early as the turn of the first century, many tribes began to migrate southward, pushing against the Roman Empire. Later, after the fifth century and the collapse of Rome, the close contact that had existed with Rome shifted towards kingdoms such as the Merovingians, who had inherited much of Rome's wealth, power, and institutions. New contacts and social networks began to be established between certain groups of people in Scandinavia, and these southerly powers. Generally speaking, Denmark and southern and central Sweden seem to have become involved in trade and power networks with Rome and its successors. Through this process individuals, ideas, beliefs, and customs commonly travelled between these groups of people (see Chapter 5).³⁶

As will be shown, significant political and cultural influence, first from Rome and later Romanesque cultures like that of the Merovingians, was transferred northward, into places like Denmark and southern Sweden, and to a lesser extent, southern Norway (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 86. See also Chapter 5). In these places, society appears to have begun to change under the influence of political and social developments that had taken and were taking place within the realms of their southerly neighbors. Society in southern Scandinavia began to stratify under a new form of leadership as warrior kings began to gain more power. As suggested above, these warrior kings seem to have had wide-ranging (and southerly) contacts, unlike the older, tribal rulers. As such, they began to control even greater parts of society, and in this process, we begin to see heavy transformations take place in both Scandinavian society and religion, which appear to have their origins in Rome and among the Merovingians, as will be shown in Chapter 5.

³⁵ See, for example; Fabech, 1991, pp. 187-200, and 1994, pp. 169-183; Brink, 2013, p. 45; and Glob, 1971.

³⁶ There is also evidence for extensive contact and overlapping cultures between the "Germanic" Scandinavians and the Celtic world as well as with Eastern European, Slavic, and Hunnic-speaking people (Hedeager, 2007; Schutz, 1983, pp. 191-202).

2.2.4 Religious Change in the Migration and Vendel Periods

As mentioned above, when the Bronze Age came to an end and the Iron Age ensued, a significant shift in ritual location and practice seems to have taken place. Later on, between the third and sixth centuries, another shift in religious practice seems to have taken place. From an archaeological perspective, the old natural locations, usually wetlands, which had been the focus of sacrality ever since the end of the Bronze Age seem to have begun to lose their importance. At the same time, the residences of the newly established elite started to become the central focuses of cult activity.³⁷ Among other things, the shift in both location and deposited artifact types seems to indicate a change in what the people involved in these rituals perceived to be sacred, as well as the cosmology and social norms associated with this sacrality.

This change in religious practice seems to reflect the continuing stratification of society. As noted above, during the late Roman Iron Age, and through the succeeding Migration (400-550) and Vendel (550-800) periods, Scandinavia was experiencing a gradual transition from decentralized, communal farming communities and small chieftainships towards larger, unified polities and more centralized kingdoms. Eventually, during and after the Viking Age (800-1100) these kingdoms would solidify into Europeanized statehood (see Hedeager, 1992). It seems as if power and influence was being transferred from smaller kin groups, and local communities to a new elite, represented by the magnate and his growing retinue. As elite individuals, and networks consisting of a developing elite milieu took ever more power and started to control commerce, they seem to have established new centers, near or at their residencies, and created new sacred places in close proximity. In this way, the sacrality, and much of the cosmic and social significance of the old sacral sites which had held influence for up to a millennium in some places seems to have been transferred from the periphery towards the property and man-made structures belonging to a specific milieu of people situated at the top of the social hierarchy. Keeping the above section on religion in mind, we must naturally wonder how these changes impacted upon the myths, gods, sacred symbolism, and rituals of the people who experienced these changes. Furthermore, we may ask what if anything in the extant sources pertaining to heathen religion might reflect these changes.

Douglas Price has described the changes in question as resulting in (and/or from) a “radical” transformation of society, and with it, a changing worldview (D. Price, 2015, p. 58).

³⁷ See Chapter 5. See also Fabech, 1991, pp. 187-200; 1999a, pp. 455-473; Fabech & Näsman, 2013; D. Price, 2015; Jørgensen, 2009; and Andrén, 2007.

Flemming Kaul, meanwhile, refers to the shift as reflecting one of two “fundamental” changes in mythology and religion that took place in the North. The first, he argues, took place in the Bronze Age when the solar myths began to disappear.³⁸ This second shift, around the middle of the first millennium, would be when a religion more recognizable as the “Æsir religion” was probably established (Kaul, 1998, p. 14). This is the period on which this present thesis will focus. Kaul argues that Bronze Age religion and the new, evolving Æsir religion of the late Iron Age and Viking Age probably had little in common (Kaul, 1998, p. 14).³⁹

2.2.5 Observing Scandinavian Religious and Social Change

The last section has worked to establish a basic temporal and theoretical foundation from which the remainder of this thesis may operate. As has been noted, we may acknowledge that religion is something which reflects its immediate social and political environment, and as such is subject to change based on changes in society. It has also been stated that religion, including rituals, symbols, and myths, served to create and reinforce power-relations between people and society, and to create and maintain group identity. The brief history given in this chapter has served to put the thesis that follows into a contextual framework: Researchers have observed a shift in religion taking place in Scandinavia during the end of the Roman Iron Age and running into the Migration and Vendel periods. Some researchers like Kaul have suggested that the origins of the Æsir religion lie here. This period of time coincides with the beginning of a new stratification in Scandinavian society in which we begin to see something of an “aristocracy” developing (something covered further in Chapter 5). Because these changes first appear to have taken place in southern Scandinavia, this thesis will primarily concern itself with that region, namely, Denmark, and southern to central Sweden. Whether or not there is merit in Kaul’s theory that an Æsir religion as a whole began in this area during this period is not the concern for this thesis. However, it is clear that religious change did begin to take place at this time, coinciding with the development of aristocracy in Scandinavia. That religious shift, and its relationship with the new emerging aristocracy in southern Scandinavia, will form the focus of the remainder of this thesis.

³⁸ I would suggest that in the solar myths themselves replaced an even older religiosity based around hunting, before the social development towards agrarianism.

³⁹ Andrén attempts to highlight a middle stage in this development: Andrén, 2014, pp. 157-66.

Chapter 3

Rulers and Religion: Approaches Past and Present

3.1.0 Approaches to Rulers and Religion: Introduction

As we have seen, the changes in religious practice that took place in southern Scandinavia around the middle of the first millennium appears to have coincided with a stratification of society in which more and more powerful rulers emerged at the upper social tiers. It is natural to question the exact relationship that these rulers might have had with religion at that time, particularly considering the observations made in Chapter 2 which suggest that during the same period, religious practice appears to have shifted in many ways from natural, communal locations towards the man-made property of rulers. In order to begin analyzing this perceived relationship with rulers in Scandinavia with religion, first we must look to the state of research as it stands. This requires that we look at the past approaches which researchers have used to analyze rulership and religion.

3.1.1 The “Sacral Kingship” Theory

The discussion of rulership and its relationship with religion is far from new. Regarding Scandinavia, this discussion has often focused on what some researchers have perceived to be a direct connection between gods and rulers, an idea which goes back at least to the middle of the 19th century and James Frazer’s (1854-1941) *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*.⁴⁰ By and large, the long running discussion about the relationship between rulership and religion in earlier years was strongly influenced by Frazer’s theory of “sacral kingship” (Frazer, 2009, pp. 220-253), and there is thus good reason to consider how the concept evolved before and after Frazer’s time.⁴¹ The historian of religion, Olof Sundqvist, recently summed up the theory of sacral kingship as it currently stands as follows.

⁴⁰ First published in 1890 as two volumes, Frazer’s work has gone through many editions. Here I will keep to the edition from 2009.

⁴¹ For more comprehensive overviews of the theory of sacral kingship, see Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 18-38; and 2005, pp. 87-124; and McTurk, 1994-1997, pp. 19-32; and 1975-1976.

Sacral kingship is defined in that the king was regarded as divine or as an offspring of the gods. He possessed supernatural powers and controlled the fate of the world. He was also considered to be the spouse of the fertility goddess and acted as a high priest within rituals. The ritual slaying of the king was among other things an expedient in order to attain prosperity (Sundqvist, 2005, p. 88).

Sundqvist's definition sums up a century of debate and redefinition. As he notes, the idea first developed in Europe during the middle of the 19th century in what Sundqvist calls "the glory-days of Positivism, Evolutionism and Diffusionism" (Sundqvist, 2002, p. 18). As stated above, its introduction to the study of Germanic religion came from Frazer who attempted to draw on the myths and rituals from around the world to construct a theoretical model of kingship. Within this model, a king could serve as a priest as well as a god, or play the role of a god (Frazer, 2009, pp. 31-35). Frazer argued that this pattern could be seen within the institution of early kingship all over the world. This concept formed just one part of Frazer's greater theory that cultures went through evolutionary periods in which societies and kingship developed from a stage in which rulers were viewed as great magicians, to a stage in which they were priestly rulers, and eventually reached a point of them being viewed as being actual divinities responsible for the fertility of the earth, something which was ensured through this ritual death and revival (Frazer, 2009, pp. 220-253). According to Frazer, at a certain point in human cultural evolution, the ruler of society often came to be viewed as a divinity. This was something he felt could be found in most cultures, including those of northern Europe.⁴²

In the 1920s and 30s, influenced in part by Darwin, Frazer and Indo-European linguistics in the previous century, many scholars of religion were still fixated on evolutionary theories and the supposed origin and development of religion. Part of this approach was reflected in the idea that sacral kingship was something that was culturally transmitted and came to places such as Scandinavia from other, older civilizations, either Indo-European cultures or from Babylon or Egypt (Sundqvist, 2002, p. 20). A growing recognition of the vital importance of rituals in ancient societies then led many influential researchers such as Hocart and Hooke to develop a school that looked for "patterns" within rituals and myths that could be used to trace the supposed origins and diffusion of religious belief and practices.⁴³ These scholars tried

⁴² Frazer also argues that in "primitive" societies, gods and men are beings "much of the same order", and that powerful sorcerers, gods, and ordinary individuals are hardly distinguishable from one another (Frazer, 2009, p. 222).

⁴³ See, for example, Hocart, 1927; Hooke, 1933, pp. 1-14; Widengren, 1958 pp. 149-203; and Engnell, 1967.

to demonstrate that the king's role "was to represent the deity and guarantor of the well-being of society" (Sundqvist 2002, p. 20). The characteristics of these patterns, however, were not drawn from Scandinavian sources, but rather Middle Eastern or easterly Indo-European ones, in other words, cultures out of which these researchers believed the patterns had originated.⁴⁴ In short, scholars from Frazer onwards had constructed a theoretical model of religious development, and then filled in its characteristics with elements drawn from a wide range of world cultures. They then applied this academically constructed model to Scandinavian religion, without looking at Scandinavian religion within its own context.

Because sacral kingship as a concept was derived out of an approach in which scholars compared "world religions" as opposed to focusing on a given religion or culture, sacral kingship itself was treated as something global, removed from any relevant context that would reflect how any particular culture might actually view kingship and its relationship with religion. Researchers such as Widengren (1907-1996) and Van der Leeuw (1890-1950), for example, discussed sacral kingship as a global archetype and a distinguished category of rulership (Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 21-22; Van der Leeuw, 1956; and Widengren, 1969). These approaches would be heavily criticized, in part because of the problems noted above, and they would eventually come to be considered obsolete in the discussion of religion in general. The same applied to the theories and methods of James Frazer, from whom these later models had originated. The models were viewed as lacking any cultural context, being too global in scope, and being too structurally contrived (see, for example, Brandon, 1958, pp. 261-291; Frankfort, 1978; and Baetke, 1964). Despite their general rejection, these approaches and their conclusions formed much of the foundation on which the theory of sacral kingship in Scandinavia developed over time.

The discussion of sacral kingship in Scandinavia has been primarily centered on Sweden and particularly on the legendary Ynglingar dynasty, who, it has been argued, ruled with a form of sacral kingship from Uppsala in the realm of the Svear.⁴⁵ The main source of evidence used to defend the sacral nature of pre-Christian Scandinavian kingship is the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal*, which Snorri Sturluson claims was composed in the ninth century by Þjóðólfr inn fróði ór Hvini (*Prologus*, Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, p. 4).⁴⁶ The argument began in the early

⁴⁴ See Hooke, 1933 regarding "cultural patterns" in the Middle East. See also Engnell, 1967; and Frankfort, 1978 regarding the use of the Near East in developing theories on divine kingship.

⁴⁵ See Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 28-32, for an overview of how sacral kingship was seen to relate particularly relates to Sweden.

⁴⁶ The actual dating of *Ynglingatal* has been a discussion of its own. Claus Krag dates it to the twelfth century (1991, pp. 208-211, 264), but most modern scholars have criticized his argument and maintain a ninth century dating. See Steinsland, 1992, pp. 226-240; Sundqvist, 2005, p. 93, and Skre, 2007, p. 407.

twentieth century when the Swedish literary scholar Henrik Schück (1855-1947) applied Frazer's sacral kingship theories to *Ynglingatal* and Adam of Bremen's account of the human sacrificial rituals at Uppsala in an attempt to construct a model of sacral kingship in Uppland. Following Frazer's ideas, Schück argued that *Ynglingatal*'s descriptions of royal deaths reflected ancient ritual killings stemming from agrarian cults in which kings' deaths were intended as sacrifices to guarantee good growth (Schück, 1904). Elias Wessén added support to this by noting that the Ynglingar were regarded as the descendants of the god Freyr (Wessén, 1924, pp. 5-8). Folke Ström (1907-1996), who did a considerable amount of work on *Ynglingatal* then supported Schück's belief that several strophes in the poem reflect the notion of sacral kingship among the Svear. He argued that the rulers were married to a goddess to whom they would inevitably be sacrificed (Ström, 1954, pp. 32-56). He also drew on Vilhelm Grønbech's (1873-1948) application of the theory of the "king's luck"⁴⁷ by arguing that King Dómalði, mentioned in both *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga*,⁴⁸ was sacrificed because he had lost his ability to bestow blessings in the form of a harvest, prosperity, and peace (Ström, 1967, pp. 52-66; and 1961, pp. 48-51).

3.1.2 Criticizing "Sacral Kingship" in Scandinavia

Since the 1960s, the idea of sacral kingship having existed in Scandinavia has been heavily criticized. For example, Walter Baetke argued that there were no kings in ancient Scandinavia that were viewed as divine, and that kingship in Scandinavia was essentially based on politics (Baetke, 1964, pp. 164-170). While Baetke did not question the existence of "sacral kingship" as a type of rulership in itself, he argued it could not be found in the more reliable sources on Scandinavian religion. His main criticism related to the reading of *Ynglingatal* among other things, where he disagreed with earlier scholars who had assumed that the beginning of the poem was lost and that Fjölfnir, the first listed king, was said to be descended from Freyr,⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Grønbech, 1937, pp. 105-142. Grønbech's theories of "luck" have been rejected by more recent scholars and should probably be discarded. See Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 244-247 for an overview of the criticisms. In short, it is probable that the words for luck such as *gæfa* and *gipta*, which more appropriately mean "gift", were transferred to the Christian meaning of "grace", and then took on the meaning of "magical luck". "according to Baetke, Lönnroth and Ejerfeldt, concepts of "divine grace" were introduced by Christians to western Europe and later transmitted to Scandinavia by English and perhaps Frankish and German clerics (Sundqvist, 2002, p. 246 citing Baetke, 1964; Ejerfeldt, 1971; Lönnroth, 1965).

⁴⁸ *Ynglinga saga*, in *Snorri Sturluson, 1941-1951*, I, p. 32; *Ynglingatal*, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, 2012, I, st. 5.

⁴⁹ *Ynglingatal*, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas*, 2012, I, st. 1. Note that the stanza says nothing of a descendancy from Freyr: "Varð framgengt/ þars Fróði bjó/ feigðarorð/ es at Fjölfnir kom/ ok sikling/ svigðis geira/ vávr vindlauss/ of viðá skyldi."

largely on the basis of Snorri's aforementioned claims in *Ynglinga saga* that Fjölfnir was descended from Freyr. Baetke, however, argued that there is no reason to assume that there is a missing beginning to the poem. He argued that Snorri probably got this information from Ari Þorgilsson (1067-1148) who, in *Íslendingabók*,⁵⁰ lists Yngvi, Njǫrðr and Freyr all as human kings preceding Fjölfnir, just as Snorri does later (Baetke, 1964; especially pp. 90-110; see also McTurk, 1994-1997, pp. 21-22). Eve Picard then followed Baetke, focusing now on Tacitus, his *Germania*, and the Germanic people as they were perceived through the Roman perspective. She concluded that kings did not have priestly functions, that there was no belief in the divine descent of kings among the Germanic people, and that sacral kingship in general is not evident in the material from Tacitus' time (Picard, 1991, pp. 114-130; see also McTurk, 1994-1997, pp. 23-25).⁵¹

It should be noted that as with Baetke, this later scholarly criticism of the notion of sacral kingship existing in Scandinavia was not the same thing as a criticism of the paradigm of sacral kingship in itself. In my view, it was in fact, a reaction to that paradigm, and actually helped to sustain it for two reasons: Firstly, by accepting it as a valid model of kingship to begin with, and secondly, by looking for whether or not kingship in Scandinavia or among the Germanic people exhibited enough of that model's markers to classify it as "sacral" or not.

3.1.3 The Twilight of the "Sacral Kingship" Theory

The discussion of whether or not sacral kingship existed in Scandinavia nonetheless caused the overall idea of "what exactly sacral kingship is" to change and develop. As researchers compared the sacral kingship model with the evidence of kingship and religion in Scandinavia, they seem to have attempted to refine the model to reflect the existing evidence, or adjusted the paradigm to account for the apparent differences between cultures. Baetke thus defined sacral kingship as existing only when the king himself is the recipient of sacrifices or is otherwise worshiped as a god (Baetke, 1964, p. 39). Folke Ström, on the other hand, defined sacral kingship as existing when the king is said to have been descended from a god, and was seen as a representative of the gods (Ström, 1954, p. 36). Ström also presented a new gradient in which the Egyptian pharaoh represented extreme sacral kingship in that he was viewed as both the offspring and incarnation of the sun-god, while medieval Christian kingship represented a form

⁵⁰ "Þessi eru nǫfn langfeðga Ynglinga ok Breiðfirðinga: I. Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr. II. Njǫrðr Sviakonungr. III. Freyr III Fjölfnir, sá es dó at Friðfróða" (*Íslendingabók*, 1968, p. 27).

⁵¹ See Krag, 1991; and Norr, 1998, for further criticism of sacral kingship in Sweden.

of sacral kingship because medieval Christian kings were ordained by God and had religious characteristics and roles (Ström, 1967, pp. 55-56). Picard in turn gave her own list of qualifications for sacral kingship among the Germanic people (Picard, 1991, p. 33). Rory McTurk compared this list with his own slightly different one (McTurk, 1994-1997, pp. 19-20). Having written extensively regarding sacral kingship, McTurk has since revised his own definition in consideration of the studies of his contemporaries.⁵² His latest definition is that “a sacral king is one who is marked off from his fellow men by an aura of specialness which has its origins in more or less direct associations with the supernatural” (McTurk, 1994-1997, p. 31).

In recent decades, a shift towards more anthropological approaches to the study of ancient religions, and an increased ability to analyze topography and archaeology have resulted in a generally different approach to how researchers consider the association between rulership and religion in northern Europe. As a result, the sacral kingship paradigm has by and large fallen by the wayside, and there has been little new scholarship which has contributed to it.

Gro Steinsland and Olof Sundqvist have written some of the most recent works dealing with the subject. Steinsland's *Den hellige kongen* rejected the notion that the king represented any deity or received sacrifices, or that he himself was sacrificed. She also had a unique take on the king's luck, taking a near opposite stance to her predecessors by arguing that it was not the king's good luck which made him special, but rather, his poor luck and his inevitable bad fate (Steinsland, 2000, pp. 65-69). Olof Sundqvist, whose own Phd thesis, *Freyr's Offspring: Rulers and Religion in Ancient Svea Society*, provides the most comprehensive overview of the subject of the relationship between rulers and the religious sphere in pre-Christian Sweden, criticizes Steinsland's arguments heavily. According to Sundqvist, Steinsland applies the sacral kingship theory in an “uncritical manner”, and he argues that her universalist perspective on sacral kingship suffers from “serious theoretical problems” (Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 36-37). Steinsland's statement that her study only deals with “religion” as such and not cultural context is, according to Sundqvist, obsolete in a modern theoretical discourse of religious study (Sundqvist, 2002, pp. 37).⁵³

⁵² These include Baetke, Krag, Picard, and Steinsland most specifically, as stated by McTurk, 1994-1997, pp. 30-31.

⁵³ It should be noted that Sundqvist nonetheless finds aspects of Steinsland's book to be in agreement with some of his own approaches: “Even if criticism can be directed against the theoretical framework (the sacral kingship theory) of and some details in Steinsland's book, it nevertheless contains many important contributions to the research on this area. The diachronic view in her presentation is in agreement with my perspective. Her thesis that the ancient rulership ideology was a bridge between the pre-Christian and Christian culture is very interesting. So, too, are her statements regarding the position of the royal saints in this process” (Sundqvist, 2002, p. 37).

There is little question that the sacral kingship discussion has been wrought with difficulties from its very beginning in the nineteenth century. According to Olof Sundqvist:

In my opinion, this paradigm (sacral kingship) implies a number of methodological difficulties. By proceeding from a universal concept and applying it to Scandinavian sources, many specific cultural and historical contexts are disregarded. This method also leads to a too narrow analysis, where only the religious dimension of the authority is taken under consideration. By applying geographically and historically limited analysis, it is possible to account for more contextual interpretations, thus producing a more reliable image of the ancient ruler ideology (Sundqvist, 2005, p. 120).

3.2. Towards New Approaches

Despite the general rejection that the sacral kingship paradigm faces in modern scholarship, it might be said that much of its development and early prominence rose from academics trying to address the question of how to relate thirteenth-century Icelandic literature to earlier periods of time in mainland Scandinavia. As stated in Chapter 1, in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, the field of archaeology had not developed well enough to really provide much insight into prehistoric Scandinavian society, or to contribute meaningfully to the dialogue regarding rulership or religion. This was still the reality as late as 1985, when an archaeology and ancient history commission report through the University of Lund stated that “The textual material is still the most important source and for this reason it is natural to emphasize the Viking Age and its religion” (as cited by Fabech & Näsman, 2013, pp. 55-56).

In order to look further back in time than the written sources, many researchers from this period used a variety of other methods. One was the philological dissection of etymologies and language structures as a means of analyzing the evolution of language and, theoretically, culture. Another approach was to look to other religions in order to construct theoretic models with which to compare Scandinavian religion (as had applied with Frazer). Over time, these older approaches simply ran their courses towards obsolescence. This was particularly true due to the increased anthropological approach that researchers began to use when studying ancient cultures, and with the analytical and technological advancements made in archaeological and

topographic studies.⁵⁴ The old comparative structural, and evolutionary approaches described above thus became obsolete by and large.

Over the last couple of decades, however, tremendous advancements have been made in our understanding of prehistoric Scandinavian society and these have played a large part in nullifying older structuralist approaches, including that of the sacral kingship paradigm. In the case of the relationship between rulership and religion, most modern researchers have abandoned the old sacral kingship paradigm all together in favor of, what Sundqvist calls, more “geographically and historically limited analysis”. Today, as we shall see, when researchers talk about the relationship between Iron-Age Scandinavian rulers, their community, and their religion and the myths and rituals that played a role in those relationships, the discussion generally revolves around particular forms of what Sundqvist calls “rulership ideologies” (see below) within limited areas, timeframes, and contexts.

3.2.1 Central-Place Research

One of the most important developments to take place in the last several decades has been that dealing with the so-called “central place complex”, which first began in the 1980s and is ongoing today. The discovery of and subsequent research into central places have contributed considerably to reshaping the way in which modern researchers view the relationship between power, rulership, mythology, rituals, and society at large. In the 1970s and 80s, a series of developments began to take place which would have a direct impact on the field of archaeology in central and southern Scandinavia, stimulating tremendous advances in researchers’ understanding of Scandinavian prehistory, particularly with regard to the study of rulership and religion in the first millennia. The traditions of Danish settlement archaeology and Swedish historic geography began to collaborate, eventually fostering more multidisciplinary approaches than had previously been possible (individual approaches drawn from fields such as geography, anthropology and history of religion) to the archaeological finds in Denmark and Sweden (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 57; and Fabech, 1999, pp. 15-28). Additional attention was given to building typology and village settlement patterns, which would become crucial for furthering the study of agrarian settlement landscapes as they developed during the Iron Age (Näsman & Roesdahl, 1993, pp. 181-182).

⁵⁴ On analytical advances, see N. Price, 2002, pp. 28-29; Moreland, 2001, 77-98; and Hodder, 1991. On technological advances, see Näsman & Roesdahl, 1993, pp. 181-183; and Näsman, 1991a, p. 333.

In the 1980s, technological advances, such as the effective application of the metal detector in field archaeology, eventually led to the discovery of many large, ancient settlement sites. Previously familiar sites were also subjected to renewed, more thorough analysis. One of these, Gudme, located on the island of Funen in Denmark, and had been a recognized site since its discovery by Chamberlain Sehested in the 1800s, was revisited, and in 1989, Ulf Näsman described it for the first time as being what he called a “center complex” (Näsman, 1991a, p. 333). Fundamental to his description was the observation that Gudme consisted of a central location around which were various elements in the landscape and settlement pattern that served different societal functions (Näsman, 1991a, 1991b). Gudme was one among many sites that became a part of the “center complex” discussion at that time, along with sites such as Helgö, Dankirke, and Birka (Brink, 1996, p. 238). In 1991, Näsman used the term “central place” to refer to all of these settlements in his article “Det Syvende århundrede” (Näsman, 1991b, pp. 165-177). The term would become part of the bedrock of the new analytical process that was beginning to develop in and around the fields of Scandinavian archaeology and the study of rulership and religion in the first millennia. According to Charlotte Fabech, central places are now defined as:

Multifunctional sites which fulfilled various functions and took place in more than one spot. Besides a centre of power with a residence-cum-hall and production areas, one finds ordinary farmhouses, shrine, sacrificial sites, a *ping* site, cemeteries, and trading places (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 56).

Because of their complexity, it was the central places that encouraged the earlier-noted multidisciplinary approach to various overlapping and interconnected concepts like trade, politics, farming, and religion, and not least with regard to how they functioned *together*, as part of the central place.

In 1993, Ulf Näsman and Else Roesdahl highlighted the success of the approach towards central place studies and underscored the importance of continuing with the multidisciplinary approach, which they felt was necessary to study all aspects of the central place. They also elaborated on some other recent archaeological breakthroughs: Dendrochronology and other improved dating methods had made it possible to precisely date the development of settlements and structures, thereby giving researchers a clear means of studying chronological continuity and change at important sites, including the aforementioned central places. Much of the old understanding of history and the relationship between events (such as economic development,

urbanization, state-formation and the relationship between communities and their neighbors) was revised or more accurately articulated during this period (Näsman & Roesdahl, 1993, pp. 181-183). In 1998, Anders Andrén elucidated the shift in the view of Iron and Viking Age Scandinavia from that of unsettled and archaic to an established and settled, albeit changing civilization (Andrén, 1998, pp. 142-184). With regard to the study of religion, dendrochronology meant it had become possible to study exactly when certain sites and even types of offerings were established, and to study chronologically when and how they changed, and to correlate those changes with other social and economic factors that were evident from the local landscape in the same period.

Between 1995 and 1998, the Swedish Research Council then funded the research project entitled *Central Place, Land and Kingdom* for which Stefan Brink published his results in volumes 28 and 29 of *Tor: Journal of Archaeology*. His report contrasts starkly with that of the above report from the University of Lund in 1985.

For new and crucial information regarding central places, we have, first of all, to rely on archaeology. However, for a coherent *understanding* of the central places, we must use an interdisciplinary, settlement-historical approach, working on archaeological excavations and finds, historical documents, literary evidence, place-names, contemporary terminology etc. (Brink, 1996, pp. 238-239).

Archaeology had thus replaced literature as the primary source for understanding the Nordic past, and not least the central places which were helping researchers to much better understand the social, political, and religious reality of pre-historic Scandinavia.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the fields of archaeology, place studies, and history of religions in Scandinavia had developed into a multi-layered complex of interdisciplinary studies. Between 2000 and 2007 the swelling field led to the research project *Roads to Midgar: Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives*. The goal had originally been to establish a “new and better dialogue between research departments inside and outside Scandinavia on the subject of pre-Christian Norse religion” (Andrén, Jennbert & Raudvere, 2006, p. 9). It had begun as a course on the archaeology of religion in 1996. However, by the time the project had developed into a full conference at Lund in 2004, its participants were coming from a variety of disciplines, and were now attached to five different research fields: the history of research and reception; prehistoric perspectives; the cultural encounter with the Roman Empire and its effect on Nordic religion; the relation between Norse religion and

Christianity; and finally, medieval folk conceptions and their connection to Nordic religion (Andrén, Jennbert & Raudvere, 2006, p. 9-10). According to Lars Jørgensen:

The project has laid a solid foundation for a renewed treatment of the whole complex issue of the pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia in the 1st century AD. It has refuted the view that Norse pre-Christian religion was a confessional religion based on specific texts. In the preserved sources the pre-Christian religion appears as *forn siður*, which can be translated as “the customs of earlier times”. The expression already reveals the Norse religion as a far more differentiated phenomenon where there was obvious potential for geographical and social differences and variations in ritual practice, its expressions and its mental content. Already now, as the archaeological traces first begin to appear in larger numbers, we see variations in both time and place (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 331).

3.2.2 The Concept of “Rulership Ideology”

As noted above, the central place discussion, as well as the general increase in interdisciplinary and contextual approaches to religion in pre-historic Scandinavia have had a tremendous impact on researchers’ understanding of the relationship between rulers and religion, particularly in southern Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. Broadly speaking, and as stated in Chapters 1 and 2.2.4, it has been generally accepted that a discernable shift in religious expression appears to have taken place in southern Scandinavia around the middle of the first millennia whereby natural worship sites such as wetlands which had been cult centers since as early as the Bronze Age were starting to be abandoned and replaced with newly constructed sites. This is particularly evident at locations where central place complexes began to develop and newly established halls and ritual buildings appear to have replaced local wetlands as ritual focal points.⁵⁵ These changes appear to coincide with the gradually stratifying society noted in Chapter 2.2 in which power was gradually shifting from local kinship-based social systems towards more centralized kingships in which warrior rulers and their retinue sat at the top. As noted earlier (see Chapter 2) and eventually this development would lead to Europeanization and early statehood.⁵⁶

As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, the aristocratic milieu that developed at this time appears to have extended itself through a network of individuals and families which reached across northern and central Europe, and included Christian kingdoms such as those belonging to the

⁵⁵ For more on this shift, see further Fabech, 1999a and b; Näsman, 1998; Jørgensen, 2009; Fabech & Näsman, 2013.

⁵⁶ See further Chapter 5. See also Hedeager, 1992; Sundqvist, 2002, p. 73; Steinsland, 2011a, p. 7; and Näsman, 1998, p. 112.

Merovingians. Individuals within this milieu were capable of travelling far and wide between central places (and kingdoms) and would have carried resources and ideas with them (Chapter 5; see also Fabech and Näsman, 2013, p. 86). In this way, a shared ideology seems to have been able to develop, over a large area, among society's elite. This ideology, which was primarily concerned with legitimizing and expanding the authority of the ruler, has been discussed more frequently in recent years, and has come to be referred to as "rulership ideology" (Steinsland, 2011, p. 1; see also Sundqvist, 2005, pp. 87-124).

"Rulership ideology", unlike "sacral kingship" is not a theory. It is an open term, which, while researchers have been discussing it for decades (see Herschend, 1993, 1998; Enright, 2013 for example), has recently been given new focus, in part because of researchers' newfound ability to have interdisciplinary dialogues, and in part because of advancements made at places such as central places that have allowed researchers to study pre-historic rulership more contextually than previously (see above and Chapter 1). This has been going on for some time now. An early example took place between 2007 and 2008, when:

An international group of scholars from different disciplines - history of religion, medieval history and celtology - attempted to gain a better understanding of the ideological aspects of rulership in the Nordic countries during the Viking and early Middle Ages (Steinsland, 2011, preface).

The resulting book, *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes* (2011), was a collection of some of the most important modern research on the relationship between power and religion in and around Scandinavia (Steinsland, 2011, preface).

Because the term "rulership ideology" is contextually fluid, it will be used throughout the remainder of this study. As noted above, it deals with how rulers and their milieu in the Nordic areas sought to legitimize and expand their power, and to create in-group solidarity through the use of rituals, traditions, symbols and narratives, as well as mutual obligations and contracts. At times, these elements would fall within the realm of "religion". For example, ritual drinking and feasting could be used to reinforce and legitimize group solidarity as well as the established hierarchy (Enright, 2013, pp. 1-38; see also Chapters 4.2 and 5). Calendrical feasts could serve as an opportunity for rulers to establish authority and influence, particularly if they could host these events on their own property (Sundqvist, 2012, p. 235; see also Chapter 5). It is clear that through the use of symbols, narratives and rituals, a ruler could attempt to

consolidate political and social authority within himself and thus, become the embodiment of power within the community.⁵⁷

3.2.3 “Religious Ruler Ideology”

Building on the recent development of the concept of rulership ideology, Olof Sundqvist has recently proposed an alternative analytic concept to the earlier-discussed sacral kingship paradigm, which he has argued is more adjusted to conditions in heathen Scandinavia (Sundqvist, 2012, pp. 225-262). He posed that “religious ruler ideology” as a concept is both contextually applicable and useful in the study of the relationship between rulers and religion in Scandinavia. “Religious ruler ideology” can be applied to different social, gender and religious concepts, it can be applied to powerful women, and it can be used in the plural, allowing for us to discuss various “religious ruler ideologies” at the same time which might overlap or even conflict with one another depending on the circumstances (Sundqvist, 2012, pp. 233-234). According to Sundqvist, the concept of “religious ruler ideology” is particularly useful and functional because “on the one hand, it contains certain ideas about the ruler’s position in society and the cosmos. On the other hand, it also includes different religious strategies for gaining legitimacy or authority” (Sundqvist, 2012, p. 233).

Sundqvist offers four possible strategies available to Iron Age Scandinavian rulers for gaining legitimacy and authority which may fall under “religious ruler ideology”. The first is “by means of the specific relation to the mythic world”. In other words, a claim by a ruler to have close relations to the mythic world. For example, this can happen either through a claim of descendance from a god or mythic being, or by claiming to be the earthly representative of a divinity or divinities.

The second strategy is “by performing central roles in (religious) rituals” (Sundqvist, 2012, pp. 234-235). In short, by holding a role in cult and religious ceremonies, a ruler attains a legitimate right to exert power in other fields of society. According to Sundqvist:

The rituals of the ruler can be described as ‘political rituals’, i.e they comprise those ceremonial practices that specifically display and promote the power of the ruler. They do not simply give form to the power; they actually construct it, and orchestrate the ruler’s position in society and the cosmos (Sundqvist, 2012, p. 235).

⁵⁷ Herschend, 1993, pp. 175-199; N. Price, 2014, pp. 517-528; Gunnell, 1995; 2013, pp. 153-178; and Chapters 6.3.4 and 7 below.

The third strategy is through “using (religious) symbols.” These symbols might consist of certain clothes, insignia, items or any other paraphernalia associated with religious or cult functions and which give the ruler perceptual power or authority. They can also be locations such as special religious sites, ritual buildings which the ruler can use to display and demonstrate political and religious power. In short, by appealing to religious authority in otherwise political arenas, such as coronations, the ruler is able to expand on and further legitimize his own authority and right to govern (Sundqvist, 2012, pp. 235-236).

The fourth and final strategy posed by Sundqvist involves the ruler controlling the cultic organization in some way in order to be able to pull off any of the other three strategies. For example, the ruler might own and manage the land that the cult site is on, and thereby be automatically involved necessarily in the rituals carried out there. This also allows the ruler to have authority over who is allowed at the site, and even select his own ritual specialists, according to his favor. According to Sundqvist, the organization of the cult might even become one of the ruler’s duties over time, and his legitimacy depended upon his maintenance of the rituals and ceremonies (Sundqvist, 2014, p. 235).

Acquiring responsibility over something is a natural consequence of having expanded authority over it. One of the reasons that sacral kingship as a concept fails but where “rulership ideology” maintains its usefulness is because there is no such thing as objective legitimacy (Sundqvist, 2012, p. 233; see also Bell, 2009, p. 190).⁵⁸ Legitimacy, whether it be of authority or power, is always subjective and depends upon the beliefs of those it invests in. As such, rulers, or any institution or individual seeking legitimacy must also seek to derive it from somewhere, as such, “law, charisma, tradition, history, democracy and religion” (Sundqvist, 2012, pp. 233-234).

⁵⁸ With regard to individuals and institutions who and which are perceived as specialized or necessary for certain ritual functions, Bell says “the development of a body of specialized agents who possess or control important mechanisms of objectification, such as ritual or educational institutions, is the development of a form of control that can be more total because it is more indirect and invisible. In this development, social control via coercive strategies demanding personal presence and explicit conflict begin to shift to social control via ownership of the means by which ‘reality’ is articulated for cognitive endorsement by all” (Bell, 2009 p. 131). She goes on to say “yet ritualization is very much concerned with power. Closely involved with the objectification and legitimation of an ordering of power as an assumption of the way things really are, ritualization is a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations. Hence, the relationship of ritualization and social control may be better approached in terms of how ritual activities constitute a specific embodiment and exercise of power” (Bell, 2009, p. 170).

3.2.4 Religion and Rulership Ideology: Conclusion

As we have seen in Chapter 2, religion, including rituals, myths and symbols are used in part as a means of legitimizing authority and power-relationships. Sundqvist's suggestion of "religious ruler ideology" seems very natural in light of the development of more contextual and multidisciplinary approaches to rulership and religion in Scandinavia, as exemplified in the central place research summarized in this chapter. It is also compatible with the description of religion given in Chapter 2.1 and championed by modern researchers like Bell. "Religious ruler ideology" is clearly an aspect of "rulership ideology" in general, and as such is less a theory and more a functioning term, embodying the various concepts that have developed in and around the study of religion in heathen Scandinavia as it relates to rulers. As Sundqvist says, it is an "open concept" which can adapt with new evidence (Sundqvist, 2012, p. 234). Naturally, rulers in Scandinavia developed some sort of ideology, and the evidence indicates that they were involved with religion to varying degrees, as we shall see in the following chapters. As such, "religious ruler ideology" is a very useful concept going forward. With that being said, I will not be emphasizing the term "religious ruler ideology" itself,⁵⁹ or searching for qualifying evidence for or against Sundqvist's four proposed strategies. They are simply useful as a means of looking at the relationship between rulers, religious activity, and Óðinn in the following chapters.

⁵⁹ In the remainder of this thesis, "rulership ideology" implies that rulers inherently seek to utilize religion (as well as any other mode of social control) if and whenever possible to legitimize their authority. So there is no need for me to specifically refer to "religious ruler ideology" itself.

Chapter 4

Óðinn and Aristocracy: Past Research

4.1. Óðinn and Aristocracy Research: Introduction

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the connection between Óðinn and aristocracy in Scandinavia has been emphasized by historians as far back as medieval writers such as Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus. However, until recently there has been very little done in way of making a detailed investigation into the relationship between Óðinn and rulership ideology itself, and how they worked together (or did not) as a whole. Part of the reason for this is because the concept of “rulership ideology” has only recently been given particular attention. Still less effort has been put into attempting to set a date for the relationship between rulers and Óðinn and look at how, when and why he developed into the primary god of the Scandinavian aristocracy.

The number of works dedicated to Óðinn over the years is naturally too extensive to go into any great detail in this thesis.⁶⁰ This section will therefore be limited to some of the more prominent and popularized views which scholars have presented and subsequently drawn on as a means of explaining the relationship between the deity and aristocracy. We will start with some of the more prominent but problematic theories, with the intent of explaining why they will not be used here. Following this, attention will be given to a few other theories which are more compatible with the preliminary evidence thus far provided.

4.1.1 Snorri Sturluson: The Foundation

As described in Chapter 1, Snorri Sturluson clearly wished to portray Óðinn as the undisputed supreme deity in his *Gylfaginning*. Not only was he ruler of the Æsir, but was also the ruler of all nations and all things (*Gylfaginning*, pp. 8-9). *Gylfaginning* also describes Valhøll as a hall to which Óðinn can summon both warriors as well as kings and jarls into an afterlife with him (*Gylfaginning*, p. 32).

⁶⁰ For extensive historiographies regarding Óðinn, see Lassen, 2011, pp. 21-75; Nordberg 2004, pp.7-23, particularly regarding Valhøll; and N. Price 2002, particularly regarding Óðinn and magic.

As was also shown in Chapter 1, Snorri's version of Óðinn in *Ynglinga saga* and in the *Prologue* to his *Edda* is a bit different in that, like Saxo Grammaticus' Óðinn, he is not a supreme deity, but an earthly king who travelled to Scandinavia from the south and set himself up as a false god (*Ynglinga saga* in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 11-16; Saxo Grammaticus, 1979, p. 25). In these euhemerized accounts, his relationship with the aristocracy is primarily based on the fact that he is a member of the aristocracy himself, as well as an ancestor to subsequent rulers such as the Skjöldungar who ruled out of Lejre in Denmark (*Ynglinga saga*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 15). Snorri's Christian bias has been noted fairly consistently by more recent scholars, as well as the need to treat him cautiously.⁶¹ Caution or not, however, Snorri has set the standard for how scholars have looked at Óðinn for centuries (see Chapter 1 and below). Óðinn has almost entirely, until very recently, been viewed as the "most powerful" deity in the Nordic and Germanic world. At the very least he has been treated as sovereign ruler of the Æsir in the Viking Age, as we shall see.⁶²

4.1.2 Jacob Grimm and Óðinn: "The Highest and Supreme"

In the 1800s and early 1900s, researchers were primarily interested in Indo-European and comparative religious or evolutionary studies (Nordberg, 2004, p. 121; and Lassen, 2011, pp. 43-75). Within this focus, Óðinn's relationship with aristocracy was acknowledged but little was done in way of asking when or how this could have come to be. In the mid-nineteenth century, Jacob Grimm (1785-1863) compiled one of the first and most comprehensive overviews of Germanic (Nordic) heathenism. There he did little more than echo Snorri with regard to the station and role of Óðinn in the so-called "Norse pantheon".⁶³ He referred to Óðinn as "the highest and supreme, universally honoured" (Grimm, 1882, p. 131), and said that "to him are traced up the races of heroes and kings" (Grimm, 1882, p. 163). Additionally, Grimm contended that "the adoration of Woden must reach up to immemorial times, a long way beyond

⁶¹ See, for example, Turville-Petre, 1972, p. 1; Gunnell, 2015, pp. 55-56; DuBois, 1999, pp. 7-8, 10-12, 56-59; N. Price, 2002, pp. 26, 54-55; Abram, 2011, pp. 207-221; Andrén, 2007, pp. 105-138; Brink, 2007, pp. 105-135; and Fabech & Näsman, 2013.

⁶² See also Chapter 2 on the multiplicity of heathen religions. Certainly today we should be less interested in asking "who was the ruler of the gods?" Such a question is not answerable, as religion is not something which is objective. We should be more interested in asking "who claimed Óðinn was king of the gods, and why?"

⁶³ See Chapter 2 and 3 regarding heterogeny in Scandinavian religions, and Chapter 7 for my thoughts on the Norse pantheon. See also Gunnell, 2015, pp. 55-76, for a more thorough criticism of the concept of a "Norse Pantheon".

the first notices given us by the Romans of Mercury's worship in Germania" (Grimm, 1882, p. 164).⁶⁴

4.1.3. Dumézil and Óðinn's Indo-European Roots

In the early to mid-twentieth century, in his famous "Three Function Theory"⁶⁵ Georges Dumézil (1898-1896) argued that Óðinn was king of the gods and protector of the royal class at least as far back as the Indo-Germanic times (Dumézil, 1973, p. 40). Dumézil equated him with the Indian deity Varuna, and suggested that Óðinn's function as a war god was essentially an extension of his primary role as a god of sovereignty: In short, sovereigns must fight wars, and often die in war. As such, Óðinn served a role as a war god, eventually supplanting the "true" war god, Týr/Tiwaz (Dumézil, 1973, pp. 41-42.).

Many of Dumézil's ideas regarding Óðinn were popularized and developed by subsequent researchers. Most common was the theory noted above that Óðinn has roots in Indo-European heritage as a god of sovereignty who eventually overshadowed and supplanted Tiwaz as the theoretic "supreme sky god of the Germans as well as their god of battle."⁶⁶ Many of Dumézil's theories, including the aforementioned "Three Function Theory" itself have subsequently been subjected to severe criticism,⁶⁷ but the influence of his theories has nonetheless remained potent.⁶⁸ By the second half of the twentieth century, however, the idea that both Óðinn and his role as king of the gods was ancient was beginning to face some scrutiny. Even Turville-Petre (1908-1978), writing in the sixties and seventies, suspected that while the figure of Óðinn might have existed in some form in Indo-European times, widespread worship of the deity probably did not occur until during or around the Viking Age (Turville-Petre, 1964 p. 66).

⁶⁴ See, for example, Tacitus, 1977, p. 108, with regards to the Germans worshipping Mercurius. See Chapter 6 regarding Medieval writers associating Mercurius with Óðinn, and Todd, 1975, pp. 183-184.

⁶⁵ See Littleton, 1973, pp. xi-xviii for an overview of Dumézil's Three Function Theory, and how Dumézil has amended it over time.

⁶⁶ Davidson, 1964, p. 57; see also Turville-Petre, 1972, pp. 10-11; Ström, 1961, p. 86; and Simek, 2007, p. 337.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Clunies Ross, 1994, esp. p. 16; Belier, 1991; Page, 1978-1981, pp. 49-69; and Gonda, 1974, pp. 139-149.

⁶⁸ For example, see Schjødt, 2008b, a work with a structuralist mindset heavily influenced by the works of Dumézil.

4.1.4. Óðinn as a God of Landless Men and the *Männerbunde*

Part of Turville Petre's explanation for why Óðinn's widespread worship would be late, was his awareness of the apparent non-worship of Óðinn among Icelanders in general. In Turville-Petre's reckoning, this was because Icelanders stemmed from west and southwest Norwegians who, according to him, worshipped the gods Freyr, Þórr, and Njǫrðr, and perhaps more importantly, opposed the kings Haraldr *hárfagri* and Eiríkr *blóðǫx*, whom Turville-Petre believed, with good reason, to have been Óðinn worshippers. In support of this argument, Turville-Petre pointed to the apparent lack of theophoric place-names connected to Óðinn in western Norway as evidence that Óðinn's prominence in the later written sources must have been an exaggeration on behalf of the writers.⁶⁹

According to Turville-Petre, the cult of Óðinn was not followed by the land-owning aristocracy, in which rulership was essentially inherited through blood-ties and established families. This traditional type of rulership in Scandinavia was, Turville-Petre felt, different from new type of ruler like Haraldr *hárfagri* whom he saw as having revolutionized Scandinavian rulership (Turville-Petre, 1964, pp. 67-69). To Turville-Petre's mind, Óðinn's cult belonged essentially to "landless men", soldiers of fortune, and military chiefs like Haraldr. He argued that Óðinn's worship must have expanded rapidly in the ninth and tenth centuries, particularly due to the success of Haraldr and his new type of rulership (Turville-Petre, 1964, p. 69).

The idea of Óðinn as the god of landless groups of warriors was not a new one by the time Turville-Petre conducted his research. Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries some scholars had been developing various theories suggesting that there had existed bands of landless fraternities of warriors in northern Europe before and during the Viking Age. Two of the earliest and most prominent of these scholars were Lily Weiser (1898-1987), who first posed the concept of the *männerbunde*, and Otto Höffler (1901-1987), who built upon Weiser's theories (Weiser, 1927; and Höffler, 1934). These fraternities were, it was suggested, bound together by secret initiatory rites and dedicated to a god who was most probably Óðinn (Schjødt, 2008b, p. 51; 2011, p. 276). These warrior cults are commonly referred to as the *männerbunde* (Weiser, 1927), and most discussions of the *männerbunde* attempted to trace it to the so-called "Indo-European world".⁷⁰ Within this theory, Óðinn has often been portrayed as a god that developed within secretive, cult groups of warriors which many of these

⁶⁹ Turville-Petre, 1964, p. 68; and 1972, pp. 1-19. See also Chapter 1 regarding Haraldr *hárfagri* and Eiríkr *blóðǫx*.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Kershaw, 2000, pp. 21-23; and Schjødt, 2008b, pp. 48-57, 2011, p. 276, both of whom provide overviews of *männerbunde* research.

researchers argued were the *berserkir* and *ulfheðnar* whose roots as cultic institutions were seen as extending back to proto-Germanic times (Schjødtt, 2008b, p. 51; Kershaw, 2000). In this way researchers have often distinguished these theoretic warrior-cults from the institutions surrounding kings and their warriors. That is to say, according to this argument, Óðinn was, as Schjødtt claims, “above all else, the god of male bands, in this world and the next” (Schjødtt 2008b, p. 51). Within the theory of the *männerbunde*, Óðinn’s later relationship with the aristocracy is seen as having developed out of a connection with much older and widespread institutions of landless warriors.

H. R. Ellis Davidson, writing in the 1960s, was clearly influenced by this theory, and attempted to connect the *männerbunde* with the more concrete existence of Scandinavian kingship as follows:

We know that companies of warriors living under strict discipline did in fact exist late in the Viking age. Literature has preserved memories of the Vikings of Jomsburg, a band of men living a bachelor life in a warrior community, with rigid rules of obedience [...]. King Svein of Denmark no doubt made use of such companies of fighting men in his invasion of England [...]. In them we may see the final phase of a long tradition of companies of selected warriors, most of them young bachelors not yet ready to marry and settle down who, along with a few tried veterans, formed the ruler’s bodyguard at the courts of the Scandinavian kings (Davidson, 1964, pp.68-69).

According to Davidson, these companies of men were dedicated to Óðinn (Davidson, 1964, p. 69) and originally operated independently from the courts of rulers, although, as noted in the above quote, the two institutions were not always mutually exclusive.

What is important to note here is that within the argument of Óðinn being a god of male warrior bands, there is the inherent suggestion that his primary development would have taken place independently of the halls of rulers as opposed to within their institutions, and that he would have been adopted by rulers at a certain later point. This line of thinking stems from the evolutionary model in which Óðinn has been argued to have originally been a psychopomp or god of death, from a very early point in time, and from there became a god of battle and of warrior groups, and then finally adopted by and important to kings (Lassen, 2011, pp. 70-72; Nordberg, 2004, p. 121).

4.1.5 Criticizing the *Männerbunde*

The *männerbunde* theory is, however, very problematic. While it is true that some researchers still advocate the *possibility* that warrior fraternities perhaps related to the *ulfheðnar* and *berserkir* existed (see, for example Kershaw, 2000; Schjødt, 2008b), the fact remains that there is not much evidence for their existence as an institution (or institutions) (see Leberman, 2005, p. 411). In recent years, even Schjødt, who has long advocated for the existence of the *männerbunde* (2008b, pp.48-57), has acknowledged that there is little support for the idea of bands of warrior cults dedicated to Óðinn having existed before or during the Viking Age independent of the retinues of rulers. Schjødt is very much aware of how theoretical his suggestions are, but has defended them by arguing that his academic models are analytically useful (my paraphrase; see footnote).⁷¹

Kershaw's research meanwhile attempts to connect various groups of warriors and cults which are sporadically (and only occasionally) mentioned in sources, over a span of 3,000 years and 7,000 kilometers (Kershaw, 2000, p. 9). The result is a highly speculative and unconvincing study, in part because Kershaw's parallels and connections are given without any contextual evidence. Furthermore, Kershaw fails to adequately (and in many cases, does not even bother attempting to) explain how his proposed connections or parallels can possibly be connected over such a vast distance in culture, space and time. Essentially, given 3000 years and 7000 kilometers, it is easy to cherry-pick unrelated data to construct a predetermined pattern, and in many ways, from my perspective, that is what Kershaw does.

The arguments provided by both Schjødt and (particularly) Kershaw for the *männerbunde* and for Óðinn's connection to it are based on older models of study that are increasingly treated as obsolete (see Chapters 1, 2, and 3.2 regarding contextual approaches) and are largely incompatible with much of what archaeology has revealed about the development of Scandinavian society prior to and during the Viking Age, as will be shown in Chapter 5.

⁷¹ "It is admittedly true that there is not much evidence of warrior bands which were ultimately linked by some religious bond to Óðinn, but does that really mean that it is "safe" to deny such a relation? The source situation concerning Old Norse religion should warn us against exaggerated use of *argumenta ex silentio*. And I believe that there is textual evidence to support the idea that notions about a link between *berserkir* and Óðinn actually can be reconstructed. Admittedly, "proofs" cannot be given, but if "proof" is to be understood in a narrow sense, it is hard to accept any sort of proof which has to do with historical reconstruction of religions" (Schjødt, 2011, p. 281).

4.2. Óðinn and Rulership Ideology

4.2.1 The Aristocratic Warband

Alternative theories regarding Óðinn's relationship with warrior groups and aristocracy have developed more recently among various scholars who have focused on warrior bands as being associated with rulers instead of independent entities (see Lindow, 1975; Enright, 2013; Nordberg, 2004). According to John Lindow, the retinue of the warrior ruler and his close fighters, also called *comitatus*,⁷² warband, or *lið*, was based around raiding voyages that went beyond the homeland of the members of the *lið* itself (Lindow, 1975, p.80). In order for a *lið* to go and fight abroad, they must be drawn together from a more or less recognized "homeland". They must also be drawn together around a wealthy, ship-owning, weapon-dispensing leader who has authority and resources within this territory to draw men around himself and go fighting elsewhere. Naturally, any successful warband, or leader of a warband, would have been a part of the emerging milieu of "warrior rulers".⁷³

Michael Enright has observed that within the retinue of the Nordic and Germanic rulers around the time of the Viking Age, an ideology of "fictive kinship" existed (Enright, 2013, p. 15). That is to say, warlords or rulers who had assembled a close retinue which comprised of warriors from different kin-groups who shared no blood relationship (something which had been the age old defining factor for loyalty) were put into a position in which they needed to create a sense of kinship to compensate the lack of blood-ties. Naturally they also would have desired to create a strong sense of group solidarity. Out of this necessity, Enright argues, a series of rituals, taboos, and beliefs would have developed that served to create a bond of "fictive kinship" between the warlord and his retainers, and between those retainers themselves (Enright, 2013 pp. 15-17). Feasts and ritual drinking, according to Enright, particularly served this purpose:

⁷² According to John Lindow, the *comitatus* of the periods just before and during the Viking Age is not the same thing as the *comitatus* described by Tacitus among the Germanic tribes in the early Roman Iron Age. Lindow observes that there was not an unbroken institution, and that the use of the term *comitatus* is more a matter of convenience (Lindow, 1975). In this thesis, "warband" or "*lið*" will be used, as one is English, the language of the thesis, and the other, the more appropriate Old Norse term.

⁷³ There is little reason to believe, knowing what we do about the rise of a warrior aristocracy and the development of the central places outlined above, that within Scandinavian society there would have been wandering institutions of professional warriors that were not connected to the rulers of the land that they were wandering. The professional warriors would have *been* the warrior aristocrats, or else outlaws, among whom there hardly would have been a long-lasting institution for a deity like Óðinn to develop.

The retainers of a lord are bound to him and to each other by ties expressed in terms of blood kinship [...] of course this is fictive kinship created through a convivial communion at the feast, a drinking which serves as a substitute for blood. As such it needed a strong religious sanction [...] communal drinking, which had the purpose of creating fictive kinship, must also be viewed as having some of the aspects of a cultic act. It aimed at creating a non-natural bond of loyalty, and liquor was used because liquor was the medium through which one achieved ecstasy and thus communion with the supernatural (Enright, 2013, pp. 15-17).

Enright also pointed out that within this “fictive kinship”, rituals served to reinforce the social hierarchy, and legitimized the rulers’ position at the head of the warband. Within this framework of fictive family, the warlord, who housed his retainers, and to whom they were sworn, put himself in the role of the “father” figure (Enright, 2013, p. 22). As noted above, the drinking rituals used to create bonds of loyalty and reinforce the social hierarchy were something which had heavy religious significance. Enright argued that the deity most strongly connected with them was Óðinn (Enright, 2013, pp. 217-239).⁷⁴

4.2.2 Valhøll as the Macrocosmic Hall

In his PhD thesis, *Krigarna i Odins sal: Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornnordisk religion*, Andreas Nordberg compares the mythological motifs and imagery of Valhøll with the rituals and the real-world layout of the aristocratic hall in Viking Age Scandinavia. He refutes much of the older scholarship involving the origins of Valhøll, which, based on evolutionary thinking, argued that Valhøll had developed out of what had originally been a belief in an underground kingdom, mountain, or mound where people dwelt after death.⁷⁵ He also rejects the theory put forward by Magnus Olsen that Valhøll was originally taken from the Roman colosseum, (Nordberg, 2004, pp. 13-36; see also Olsen, 1931-1931).

Instead, Nordberg argues that Valhøll’s development would have taken place within the context of the milieu of aristocratic warriors who worshiped the god. Within the *lið* or warband of the aristocracy there would have been a mutual relationship between the leaders and their warriors, whom the leaders considered to be a part of their family and household, based on the concept of “fictive kinship” above. In return for unlimited support, the leader threw lavish

⁷⁴ Nordberg, 2004, pp. 85-107.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Simek, 2007, p. 247; Turville-Petre, 1964, p. 55; Ström, 1961, p. 217; and Golther, 1895, pp. 88, 288.

feasts, and gave gifts, wealth, and war-booty. These rituals would have taken place in the halls of the leaders. These halls, according to Nordberg, would have been a dominant element in organizing and maintaining the warband, and a defining aspect of their identity (Nordberg, 2004, p. 303; see also Herschend, 1993, 1998, and Chapter 5.3).

It is within this aristocratic warband, Nordberg argues that many of the depictions of Valhøll and of Óðinn would have developed, and it is natural that the images would reflect their own ideal circumstances on this earth, and what they expected for themselves after death. He argues, in addition, that many of the rituals in the aristocratic hall would also have been reflected in Valhøll imagery:

The ritual drinking seems to have constituted a very prominent part of the ceremonies in the hall. The actions were formalized, with the woman of the hall acting as the leading officiant. The mutual drinking laid the foundations of the spirit of community within the warband. But the mead and beer also constituted a communion drink that offered religious unity with the gods and the dead. Animals were also slaughtered during the ceremonies. The blood and parts of the animals seem to have been sacrificed to the gods, whilst the meat was cooked and eaten. This type of cult activity is probably what lies behind the motif of the drinking ceremonies in Valhøll, and the boar, Sæhrímnir, which was slaughtered and eaten by the *einherjar* (Nordberg, 2004, p. 304).

4.2.3 Óðinn and the Warlord

Other modern researchers have added further support to the idea that elements associated with Óðinn were born out of the context of the milieu of the warrior aristocrats. Neil Price, whose research will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6, has recently suggested that within certain circumstances, Scandinavian warlords might have attempted to portray themselves as both warlord as well as god of war (N. Price, 2014, pp. 517-538). According to Price, certain helmets and masks, particularly those from Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde, along with other supporting artifacts, suggest that leaders would have attempted to personify or role-play mythic or heroic figures, including Óðinn. (N. Price, 2014, p. 533). The idea suggested is that within a ritual setting, perhaps in a mask depicting Óðinn, the political leader may have symbolically (or literally, depending on the perspective of the observer) at least partially taken on the outward characteristics of the deity, thereby demonstrating and legitimizing his connection with the deity in a very powerful way.

Terry Gunnell has suggested that rulers were thus using Óðinn differently than the way in which they had used other Scandinavian deities, in other words ‘performing’ Óðinn themselves, as opposed to relying upon an idol or a holy natural site (Gunnell, 2013, pp. 153-178). By dressing as the god and performing rituals that demonstrated their connection to him in their own hall, rulers were thus able to make themselves independent of local cults and further legitimize their own power:

What we are witnessing here is a ruler who does not have to depend on omens and prophecies interpreted by his priests or priestesses (like those described by Strabo and Tacitus). This is a ruler who has taken the god into himself as part of his alleged bloodline, a man who in the sacred time of the performance actually “becomes” the god, and could thus take the god with him wherever he goes (Gunnell, 2013, p. 168).

In short, the static god also became a moving god. Like the other scholars noted above, Gunnell argues that Óðinn was a deity that was imported into the Norwegian and Swedish scene and gained a foothold among the ruling class that were connected to the development of the local central places. This occurred, according to Gunnell, sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries. Gunnell also suggests that Óðinn was never able to gain a foothold among the general populace. He concludes with a theory that in many ways Óðinn was a deity that helped pave the way for the coming of Christianity because his acceptance uprooted religion from the general populace and local geography and transported it to the ruler, and man-made structures. By the time that Christianity established a foothold in Scandinavia, this spacial, hierarchal, and cosmic layout would have already been familiar to local Scandinavians (Gunnell, 2013, pp. 170-171; see also Fabeck & Näsman, 2013, p. 97).

The general arguments made by modern researchers such as Gunnell, N. Price, and Nordberg, among others noted above, are more clearly consistent with what we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3 regarding the use of religion, rulership ideology, and the development of aristocracy in Scandinavia. As noted, these researchers have suggested that rulers, and particularly warrior kings who ruled over large areas, attempted to legitimize their right to rule and the centrality of their hall, through a developing ideology that linked themselves and their hall to the world of the gods. The theories of Nordberg, Gunnell, and N. Price also suggest that these ideas seemed to have developed by and large within the nucleus of the hall and the aristocratic warband itself instead of being introduced whole-sale from another group of people, or extending back into antiquity, as older, structuralist scholars such as Dumézil have argued.

4.2.4 Óðinn and Aristocracy Research: Conclusion

A sufficient foundation of analytical and background material has now been established and the remainder of this thesis will build on this foundation. The following chapter will go on to comprehensively analyze the archaeological and contextual evidence for the development of the aristocratic milieu described in Chapters 2 and 3. The validity of this approach lies, not least, in the fact that the aforementioned theories posed by, N. Price, Gunnell, and Nordberg, are all based on the idea that Óðinn, or at least the important elements of his cult, developed essentially within the new aristocratic milieu of Scandinavia itself. A detailed understanding of when and where this milieu developed, who the new milieu was in contact with, where their influences came from, when their halls first began appearing,⁷⁶ and what the structural layout of their settlements looked like, should help to illuminate these theories, and allow for new additional comparisons and conclusions to be drawn.

⁷⁶ Obviously, if the concept of Valhøll was modelled after the life of aristocrats in the hall, then knowledge of when the hall developed and this lifestyle began to develop will allow for more accurate parameters of when the concept of Valhøll began to emerge.

Chapter 5

The Rise of Scandinavian Warrior-Aristocracy

5.1. Introduction and Methodology

As we have seen in Chapter 2.2, in the past several decades, archaeologists have described a gradual change taking place in the structure of Scandinavian society around the middle of the first millennium, something which is reflected in the development of various central places and with the subsequent consolidation of political and religious power at these locations. Researchers have interpreted these developments as indicative of a stratifying society in which power was shifting from smaller tribes and kinship-based social systems towards larger realms dominated by a more powerful aristocracy which oversaw a more institutionalized political, military, and religious system. According to researchers, the new form of aristocracy based much of its ability to rule, including much of its values and its ability to obtain and maintain wealth, on warfare. I have also demonstrated the long academic history in which historians, beginning with Snorri Sturluson, have regularly emphasized the relationship between the god Óðinn and these new kings and aristocratic warriors.

In the following section, I will attempt to look more closely at the circumstances in Scandinavia during the Iron Age prior to the Viking Age which have been predominantly described by archaeologists in recent years. The objective is to give a clearer view of the material data indicative of social and political change in Scandinavia and to present a more or less cohesive depiction of the power networks which emerged between the Roman Iron Age and the Viking Age in what is now Denmark and southern Sweden. Special attention will be paid to the form and origin of influences on these power networks, as I believe that an understanding of the contextual circumstances for the development of a specific type of social milieu in south Scandinavian society is crucial for understanding the nature of that milieu. Due to its complexities, the archaeological data can naturally be difficult to interpret or relate beyond generalities and truisms (see, for example, Hårdh, 2003, p. 59). Nevertheless, and while there are always exceptions within the archaeological record, some very specific patterns do emerge that the following section will attempt to flesh out.

Interpreting, and even deciding what classifies as a “central place” is difficult, primarily because so many places with differing characteristics have been categorized as central places. This has, in many ways, resulted in the definition becoming vague in and of itself. This can make it difficult to determine the roles and functions individual centers may have had or how they developed (Hårdh, 2003, p. 27). That being said, it seems clear that prior to the arrival of “true” towns in Scandinavia during the Viking Age, craft production and exchange of goods in Scandinavia took place essentially in a rural context only (Skre, 2008, pp. 83-93). This seems to have predominantly been focused around large settlement complexes which centered first and foremost around the residences of rulers and warriors who, if not always rulers themselves, held a special position in society at the aforementioned central places.

The central places in question not only controlled the production and import of trade goods, they were also connected to the production of skilled craftworks such as jewelry. In short, these sites were places where prestige goods were exchanged and consumed. As we shall see, they also had a clear cultic function which, much like the trade and production that they controlled, appears to have resulted in wide regional influence very much in line with Sundqvist’s proposed religious ruler ideology (see Chapter 3.2.3. See also Skre, 2008, p. 86; Hedeager, 2008; Jørgensen, 2009, pp. 320-332; Brink, 1996, pp. 235-282).

According to Lars Jørgensen, these central places can be distinguished between what he calls “first-generation” sites, such as Gudme on Funen in Denmark, Sorte Muld on the island of Bornholm, and Uppåkra and Helgö in southern Sweden; and “second-generation” sites, of which there are many more of, including powerful centers such as Lejre, and Tissø on Zealand, Järrestad in Scania, and Uppsala in the Mälaren region of central Sweden (see below). The first-generation sites are much older, originating as far back as the third or second centuries. Most central places however, were not established until the fifth and sixth centuries and seem to have succeeded the first-generation sites in their importance (Jørgensen, 2009, 2014). The widespread establishment of such central places after the fifth century and the nature of these sites will be an important subject later in this chapter.

5.1.1. Southern Scandinavia's Connections to Rome

During the Roman Iron Age

During the Roman Iron Age in the first four centuries AD, Rome was the dominant political, economic, and military force in Europe (Glaz, Voisin & Bohec, 2009, 185-200). Its impact on its neighbors was tremendous and, according to archaeologists, cannot be underemphasized (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 86). The borders of the Roman Empire were politically clear, but its cultural impact expanded far beyond these into “barbarian” territories. Roman luxury goods such as bronze and silver vessels, glass bowls, brooches and jewelry, and even bronze statues of Roman deities have been found abundantly in Denmark and southern and central Scandinavia (Wilson, 1980, p. 10; Hårdh, 2003, 28-36; Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 86). Indeed, some of the most magnificent Roman artifacts found beyond its borders have been discovered in Scandinavia, such as the Roman weapons deposited in Danish bogs and the silver and bronze jugs and dishes found in a grave at Hoby, Denmark, which depict mythical scenes from the Homeric Cycle (Wilson, 1980, pp. 35, 39).

Long-distance trade during the early Roman Iron Age seems to have consisted almost entirely of gift exchange in luxury products which, among other things, according to Birgitta Hårdh, signifies that chiefs in Germania Libera were providing the Roman military with valuable raw materials in exchange for Roman luxury goods (Hårdh, 2003, p. 29). It seems evident that some of these trade contacts, as well as mercenary warriors and other forms of diplomatic personnel would also have spent time within Rome proper. Many of the individuals in question would have spent time in the Roman military complex, before returning to Scandinavia, often with wealth and prestige (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 86).

It seems clear that during Rome's final centuries, Germanic peoples spent increasingly more time participating in the society and political processes of the empire (Willems, 1989, pp. 33-45; Cameron, 1993, pp. 133-150, 187-188; and Pohl, 1997, pp. 33-34). Indeed, by the end of the fourth century, over half of the Roman officers were of Germanic origin. Furthermore, as both Walter Pohl and Willem Willems point out, it seems clear the empire did not bar members of regional elites, even those from beyond its periphery, from gaining access to prestige and authority within its system (Pohl, 1997, p. 35; and Willems, 1989, p. 43).

As early as the second century, and into the fourth and fifth centuries, Rome had created strategic “buffer zones” all along its frontier in Germania. These were essentially regions inhabited by local, Germanic populations who were allied with Rome, increasingly militarized,

and funded by the Roman Empire. According to Willems, “a rather prosperous, strongly militarized population group with caste-like properties developed in the second century” in the Rhine region and along the Roman frontier, as a direct result of this process (Willems, 1989, p. 40). These originally Germanic peoples quickly became something of a Roman/Germanic “melting pot” (Willems, 1989, pp. 42-45; and Pohl, 2013). One of these groups were the Frankish Merovingians, and will be covered in more detail in Chapter 5.2.

The implication here is that the influence that Rome would have had on southern Scandinavia was not only through trade and war and the exchange of physical goods. In the case of at least some members of Scandinavian society, the influence would have been ideological, stemming from contacts that were direct, personal and intimate, either directly with Rome, or with Romanized Germanic realms. In all likelihood, powerful individuals from southern Scandinavia would have had personal contacts and relationships within Rome, and they would have also had a fluent understanding of the Roman way of life, ranging from military tactics to political and religious formalities. They would have brought this knowledge, as well as increased wealth and prestige (often reflected in the form of prestige goods) to their homelands and their families and followers in Scandinavia or northern Europe.

5.1.2 Southern Scandinavia in the Roman Iron Age

As noted in Chapter 2.2.3, society among the Germanic people during the Early Roman Iron Age consisted largely of smaller tribes with limited regional influence. This social structure is not only described in Roman written sources (for example, Tacitus, 1977, pp. 101-141), it is also reflected in the archaeological record. Most of the large central places had yet to develop in around 100 AD when Tacitus was writing. Imported luxury goods in Denmark and Scania at this time are almost entirely found in the form of grave goods associated with minor chieftains, and distributed more evenly than in later periods, indicating that tribal territories and elite influence was still rather limited and decentralized (Hårdh, 2003, p. 29).

At about 200 AD, however, a shift can be detected in the social structure in some isolated parts of Scandinavia. At this point, we start seeing imports, particularly prestige goods, becoming much less evenly distributed across southern Scandinavia. Instead, they begin to compile at particular central locations (Randsborg, 1994, p. 209). These locations then begin to develop into the first-generation central places and will be covered in greater detail below. The people operating out of these sites appear to have begun at this point to exhort local power and

influence, gradually taking control over the distribution of wealth. The obvious result is that wealth began to centralize, and those who controlled it at these locations were able to expand their wealth and power further, as we shall see.

The development of new centers of power during the third century and after nonetheless reflects more than the stratification of wealth and power in Scandinavia. They also reflect the attempts by certain parts of Scandinavian society to adapt to and participate in the political and economic activity in Rome and central Europe. According to Jørgensen, it is noticeable that the structural layouts of Gudme, Uppåkra, and Sorte Muld (see below) at least are similar. All of them, including Helgö, focus around a dominant chieftain's manor, around which are organized a large number of subordinate craftsmen's farms (Jørgensen, 2011, pp. 77-78). According to both Jørgensen and Andrén, it is noticeable that the organizational layouts of these centers closely resemble Roman settlements (Jørgensen, 1994, pp. 53-63; and Andrén, 1998). Andrén goes so far as to suggest that the central places established later, in the Migration period, were actually modelled after Roman towns (Andrén, 1998, p. 148). According to Dagfinn Skre, these central places in Scandinavia were not true towns yet, as true towns did not come to exist until around the Viking Age (Skre, 2008, pp. 84-88). According to Fabech & Näsman, they are instead:

[...] Scandinavian attempts to meet new societal demands on local, regional, and super-regional levels, demands created by the pull-and-push forces of the Late Roman Empire and the successor states. The Scandinavians answered the challenge with a new settlement type, developed on the basis of the traditional structure of rural settlements, supplemented with increased emphasis on central functions (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 63).

This was the backdrop against which we see the first stratification of society in Scandinavia during the Roman Iron Age, something which manifested itself with the development of multiple locations of centralizing wealth and power. To get a more nuanced idea of how these central places developed, it is beneficial to introduce at least Uppåkra and Gudme, which were two of the most wealthy and influential settlements in southern Scandinavia during the Roman Iron Age.⁷⁷ The next section will present an overview of some of their basic features, particularly during the Roman Iron Age. These sites will reappear throughout this chapter, wherever their details relate to the time period and subject being discussed.

⁷⁷ Helgö and Sorte Muld are also covered, albeit briefly, at the end of the chapter.

5.1.3 Uppåkra in the Roman Iron Age

The central place known as Uppåkra has been excavated in some detail in recent years,⁷⁸ and has rich occupation layers dating as far back as 100 BC (Larsson, 2002, pp. 19-20). The majority of finds from metal detectors, however, stem from the Vendel period (550-800 AD), indicating that this was the period during which the Uppåkra was at its peak in terms of the production and consumption of prestige goods that took place there.

As stated above, during the Roman Iron Age, Scandinavian society had consisted for the main part of smaller, decentralized tribes that began to consolidate themselves into larger bodies in some areas around the period after 200 AD. On the basis of archaeology, in Scania in particular, society clearly appears to have been divided into various, small decentralized units. The sites of the residences of local chieftains from the period are indicated by rich grave-finds, which allow us to see roughly how territories were situated and the dispersal of wealth and power in the region. It is noteworthy that the territories immediately surrounding Uppåkra and its adjoining regions in south-western Scania are lacking in such rich grave-finds during the middle and late Roman Iron Age (Helgesson, 2002, p. 37). Here, unlike the surrounding regions, the richest material seems to have been concentrated at the settlement at Uppåkra itself, instead of being buried with the dead. According to Bertil Helgesson, this is evidence that Uppåkra had a rather large district tied to it which was distinguished from the surrounding tribal units in that it was controlled by an emergent, powerful group operating out of the settlement at Uppåkra itself (Helgesson, 2002, p. 37).

The central features of the site at Uppåkra are, at the center, an area of about 35 by 15 meters demonstrating a “mosaic of hearths, and support pillars” (Larsson, 2011, p. 195), indicating several sequences of longhouses, and containing valuable objects (gold, brooches, drinking vessels), showing that they housed the wealthy individuals that controlled the site. Surrounding these buildings are several smaller subordinate farm structures and production sites (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 335).

A unique building was found near the rich residence buildings at Uppåkra. The building was designed as a stave-building and had central pillars⁷⁹ that were unusually large, particularly for the building’s otherwise small size, (which was about 13.5 meters long and between 4.5 and

⁷⁸ See, for example, Bergqvist, 1999; Stjernquist, 1999; Helgesson, 2002, 2004; Larsson, 2002, 2006, 2011; Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004; Lenntorp & Piltz-Williams, 2002; and Hårdh, 2002, 2003, 2008.

⁷⁹ The existence of the central pillars in and of themselves is unusual and not found on ordinary houses of this size (Larsson, 2002, p. 27).

6 meters wide). The supports, wall trenches, and pillars indicate that the stave-building was impressively tall for that time period (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, pp. 6-13). This was clearly an architectural decision intended, not least, to draw attention to the building and cause it to stand out. The building seems to have been established by or during the third century.

The finds from within this “high-timbered”⁸⁰ building, as well as the yard surrounding it include gold foils and other gold objects, glass from drinking vessels, and a large quantity of ritually deposited weapons.⁸¹ On the basis of the design of the building itself and the special characteristics of the finds in and around it, there is little doubt that the building was intended for and used exclusively for ceremonial purposes. From here on we will refer to such buildings as “cult-houses” for simplicity’s sake, following the examples of other recent research (Larsson & Lenntorp; 2004, Larsson, 2002 p. 26-28; Jørgensen, 2009, p. 336).

Summing up, the material deposition layers around the rich residence buildings and the cult-house at Uppåkra are exceptionally rich with prestigious goods which date back to the Roman Iron Age. Some of the goods, as we shall see, were manufactured on the spot while other objects were imported from abroad (including Rome itself). These indicate that the individuals who operated out of Uppåkra was exceptionally wealthy and also in close contact with the Roman Empire (Helgesson, 2002, p. 33).

A clear indication that the milieu at Uppåkra put an emphasis on their military power is seen in the fact that the depositions at and around the cult-house and longhouses at Uppåkra include a large amount of warriors’ equipment. Most of this equipment has been found concentrated in specific locations around the cult-house, with the largest concentration being about 25 meters to the north of it (Helgesson, 2004, p. 224). During the Roman Iron Age it is comparatively rare to find warriors’ equipment within the living spaces of actual settlements in southern Scandinavia rather than included as grave goods (Helgesson, 2004, p. 223). However, the concentration north of the cult-house has yielded about 300 objects deposited in a shallow depression covering 70 square meters, with the heaviest concentration of weapons being deposited on a small rise made by a scattered layer of stones (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 41). 136 of the 300 objects are lance and spearheads, but there are also parts of shields, arrowheads, some swords, and iron implements with unknown functions. It is also worth noting that parts of human skeletons have also been found buried among the warriors’ equipment (Helgesson, 2004, p. 224). These skeletons do not appear to belong to a “grave” as such and so their

⁸⁰ “Hittoz æsir/ á Iðavelli/ þeir er hǫrg og hof/ hátimbroðo” (*Völuspá*, st. 7; see also *Grimnismál*, st. 16).

⁸¹ The objects found at Uppåkra will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 5.3 and 5.4.

discovery with the hoard of weapons seems to indicate that the individuals were either sacrificed, or put there for some other decidedly ritualistic purpose.

The period over which the weapons were deposited at and around the Uppåkra cult-house is a long one. The oldest finds date to shortly after the first signs of human settlement, around the second century (before the site began to develop as an elite residency). The weapon depositions continued to take place until at least the eighth century (Helgesson, 2004, pp. 225, 231). It also is interesting to note that the weapon depositions at Uppåkra begin contemporaneously with the well-known Danish bog offerings of weapons at Illerup, Vimose, Nydam and Ejsbøl in Denmark (Ilkjær, 2000, pp. 67-70).

The correlation between the practice of depositing collections of weapons at bogs in Denmark, and near the cult-house at Uppåkra is probably not coincidental. Indeed, the weapon hoards in both Denmark and at Uppåkra show various other similarities over and above the fact that they originated at about the same time. It is apparent that in both the large bog finds of weapons in Denmark and the weapon depositions at Uppåkra, the instruments were subjected to intentional destruction before being deposited (Ilkjær, 1991, p. 33; Lenntorp & Piltz-Williams, 2002; and Helgesson, 2004, p. 226). The tips of the spears and lances were bent, and the shield bosses and handles were hacked into pieces. This kind of treatment has, of course, been described as a sort of ritual (Helgesson, 2004, p. 226), although exactly what sort of ritual can only be guessed. From the unique treatment of the weapons, and the inclusion of human corpses, it is obvious they were not simply stored or deposited mundanely. There was some sort of religious relationship with the act of depositing them, and the location in which they were deposited.

Another interesting comparison can be made between the weapon depositions in Denmark and at Uppåkra. As noted above, the depositions begin roughly contemporarily. During most of the Roman Iron Age, the weapon depositions at the other locations in Denmark are made in much higher quantities than at Uppåkra. Nonetheless, towards the end of the Roman Iron Age and at the beginning of the Migration period (around 400 AD), the weapon depositions in bogs begin to decrease significantly, even coming to a halt at places such as Vimose. At Uppåkra, however, they peak at the end of the Roman Iron Age, and continue throughout the Migration and Merovingian periods, in centuries after the depositions at Danish bog sites have already come to an end, although occurring at a reduced rate than during the Roman Iron Age (Helgesson, 2004, 235). The key difference between the Danish bog deposits, and the weapon deposits at Uppåkra is, of course, that the weapons at Uppåkra are buried on dry land at the heart of an active settlement, in close proximity to the cult-house, while the Danish deposits

occurred away from the settlement in a watery area (see Fabech, 1991, pp. 187-200; and 1999a, pp. 455-473). The implication is that while the recipient (if there was one) of the offerings at the Danish wetlands presumably resided in the natural, watery area, the recipient of the depositions at Uppåkra was situated in or near the cult-house.

As noted above, there are many signs that the elite which operated out of Uppåkra were part of a connected network that existed in south-west Scania and eastern Denmark during the Roman Iron Age. This can be seen not least in the similarities that exist in the structural layouts found at Gudme and Uppåkra (which will be explained below). It can also be seen in the similarities in the dispersal of shared types of trade goods (such as imported glass from Rome, and Roman coins, about 50 *denars* having been found at Uppåkra dating to the first century). A network of trade and personal contacts also seems to have existed between Zealand, south-east Funen, Jutland, Bornholm, and Scania, Öland, Gotland, and central Sweden. In the early part of the Roman Iron Age, western Scania, the region in which Uppåkra lies, seems to have received far less imported goods than its surrounding areas, something which implies that, at least at this point, Scania was more on the periphery of the main trade networks with Rome than many parts of Denmark and the Baltic (Hårdh, 2003, pp. 30-33). Toward the end of the Roman Iron Age, however, Scania appears to have become increasingly involved with this trade network (Hårdh, 2003, p. 30), and as its involvement increased, so did its power and influence.

In the Early Roman Iron Age, Uppåkra was already showing marked evidence of becoming a seat of power for a wealthy elite retinue which had widespread trading and personal contacts and a warrior mentality. Much of what has been discussed in this chapter remained true of Uppåkra throughout the subsequent Migration and Vendel periods (400-800 AD), as will be discussed in sections Chapters 5.2 and 5.3.

5.1.4 Gudme in the Roman Iron Age

The central place settlement known as Gudme is located between the Gudme lake and the coast lying north of the settlement of Lundeborg on the island of Funen in Denmark. Unlike most central places, which tend to be recent discoveries, Gudme was discovered in the nineteenth century (see Chapter 3), and has been a site of interest for archaeologists ever since. As such, it has yielded significantly more data than most places and has provided the most complete picture of the layout and development of a central place to date. Indeed, Fabech and Näsman have referred to it as the “mother of all central places in Scandinavian archaeology” (Fabech &

Näsman, 2013, p. 57). It has since been used by a number of scholars as a model with which to treat other settlements (Jørgensen, 2011) and has even been used as a blueprint for studying pre-Christian cosmology in Denmark.⁸²

As with Uppåkra, the site consists of a large elite manor surrounded by several smaller farms, workshops, and production sites.⁸³ The archaeological data at Gudme indicates that between the Roman Iron Age and the Migration period, a society of skilled, specialized craftsmen were grouped around the residence of a ruler (or rulers) who succeeded in accumulating an incredible amount of wealth at the settlement through trade-contact (particularly with Rome), as well as through the production of high quality prestige goods at Gudme itself, and the levying of tribute from settlements that were dependent upon Gudme. The settlement was further surrounded by, and clearly distinguished from a larger network of agrarian farms. By the end of the Roman Iron Age, Gudme seems to have consisted of at least 50 farms and over 500 individuals.

Traditionally, the name “Gudme” has been interpreted as “home of the gods”, and indeed the settlement is encircled by three hills whose own names indicate that they might have had some religious significance for the people who lived at Gudme.⁸⁴ The settlement seems to have flourished between the third and sixth centuries, although the accumulation of cultural layers indicates that its origins go back earlier than that (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 78; Fabeck & Näsman, 2013, p. 57).

Gudme appears to have been part of a complex that consisted of both itself and the settlement of Lundeborg, which had direct access to the sea. Of the two settlements, Gudme seemed to have served as the center of political and religious power and of craft production in the area, while Lundeborg served as the main gateway for the exchange of goods and communication by sea (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 78; see also Hedeager, 2001 and 2002; and Sundqvist, 2011b).

From the second half of the third century until about the sixth century, two buildings of unusual dimensions and unique usage stood at the center of the settlement (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 83). The first, apparently the apparent magnate’s residence, was a longhouse measuring almost

⁸² Lotte Hedeager has attempted to argue that Gudme was modelled after Ásgarðr, as it is described in thirteenth-century Icelandic sources, but her methodology has been criticized: See Hedeager, 2001 and 2002; and Sundqvist, 2011b.

⁸³ Unless otherwise noted, this overview of Gudme follows the more detailed overviews in Jørgensen, 2009, pp. 332-334; 2010, pp. 273-277; and 2011, pp. 77-89.

⁸⁴ The hills in question are Gudbjerg (the hill of the god/gods), Albjerg (the hill of the shrine) and Galbjerg (possibly the hill of sacrifice) (Hedeager, 2002, p. 5; and Sørensen, 1985, pp. 131-135).

500 square meters.⁸⁵ As far as our archaeological data is concerned, it was the largest building in Denmark during the Roman Iron Age and Migration period (Sundqvist, 2011, p. 64). It would have appeared monumental compared with the much smaller craft buildings that surrounded the residence. Near the monumental longhouse stood a second building, measuring between 200 and 250 square meters. This second building has been compared to cult-houses like the one located at Uppåkra (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 83). In the fifth century, the monumental longhouse was taken down and replaced with a smaller (but still comparatively large) longhouse. The older cult-house remained functional and in place throughout the entire period, however. One century later, in the beginning of the sixth century, for some reason the entire elite district appears to have been abandoned.

During the entire period that the elite residence was in use, there seems that there only ever stood two buildings on the immediate spot at any given time. No evidence of adjacent utility buildings, or of the production of food or craft-stuff has been found in the vicinity of the buildings (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 83). On the contrary, there are many other features and special finds in the immediate landscape of the complex to indicate that a range of ritual functions were associated with it. These include tremendous depositions of wealth in the form of gold and silver objects, Roman *denarii*, and jewelry. These depositions took place at both the older and younger longhouses as well as the secondary building, as well as in a low-lying area just southeast of the buildings. These will be covered in greater detail at the end of the chapter.

A significant amount of wealth has also been found at craft-sites for gold and silversmiths and bronze casters at Gudme. The locations of these craft-shops are confirmed by the many ingots, bits of scrap metal, casting waste, crucibles, tools and weights for weighing alloys found at the farms encircling the two elite buildings. Brooches, pendants, beads, strap mounts, weapons, and gold and silver figurines were clearly manufactured on site here during the Roman Iron Age, and this specialized craft-production continued through the Migration and Vendel periods to some degree, as will be touched on in Chapter 5.3 The craft-production at Gudme obviously required steady supplies, and several hoards of gold, silver, and bronze have also been uncovered in the workshop area, most of which were imported from Rome in the form of scrap metal and coins between the third and fifth centuries (Jørgensen, 2011, pp. 82-87). These would have been melted down and reused in Gudme's own craft-production.

⁸⁵ Longhouses from this period were normally between 150-250 square meters. The Gudme longhouse was effectively twice as big as an average Danish longhouse (Jørgensen, 2010, p. 273).

Rome's impact on Gudme seems to have been significant during the Roman Iron Age. According to Jørgensen, the most likely reason that Gudme ever developed as an important place was, in fact, because of Rome itself (Jørgensen, 2011, pp. 87-88). During the third century, there appears to have been a dramatic increase in the quantity of mass produced Roman imports into Scandinavia, correlating precisely to the time at which both the elite complex and the coastal landing site at Lundeborg were established. Indeed, as noted above, a great deal of imported Roman artifacts have been found at both Gudme and Lundeborg. Bronze objects, including parts of statues, hack silver, glass vessels, over 200 *denarii*, and Roman silver (including silver figurines) and jewelry have all been found around the main residence at Gudme, in addition to the large quantities of Roman valuables found at the workshop areas. Many fragments of third and fourth century Roman goods from the Rhine area, such as glass, bronze objects, and *terra sigillata* have been found at both Gudme and Lundborg (Jørgensen, 2011, pp. 82-83). Many of these Roman imports are unique in a Scandinavian context, indicating the possibility that they might have only ever come to Gudme, and nowhere else in Scandinavia.

As noted by Jørgensen, a site the size of Gudme required both organization and protection (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 88). The long-distance contacts necessary for the supplies that the craftsmen at Gudme needed would also have required organization and direction of a higher level than that which they were capable of. The port and the settlement itself required the defense of a local military power, and the Roman Empire itself needed diplomatic alliances in the region. The local chieftain whose milieu controlled the wealthy complex at the heart of Gudme filled this necessary role, and in addition to overseeing and protecting Gudme and Lundeborg, was also able to demand tribute, not only from dependent settlements, but from the workshops themselves that the ruler controlled (Jørgensen, 2011, pp. 84-88). In order to have had the power to extract such tribute, and in order to run and control such a large complex, the ruler at Gudme must have had the ability to retain a large contingency of warriors. The fact that many weapons were produced on site at Gudme indicates that the aristocracy that was developing there, like that located at Uppåkra, was one which was based on martial capabilities and an ability to maintain long-reaching diplomatic contact.

5.1.5 Scandinavia in The Roman Iron Age: Conclusion

We can conclude that in the Roman Iron Age, various networks of contacts began to establish themselves in southern Scandinavia, as decentralized expanses of small tribes began to form into confederacies, and power began to become centralized, at least in some locations. Gudme and Uppåkra are key examples of this. Johan Callmer has pointed out, that the existence of these new central places does not necessarily mean that the elite milieu stationed at them had control over large expanses of territory in Denmark or Sweden. At least in the Roman Iron Age, we should treat the sites like Gudme and Uppåkra as “expanding islands of power in a sea of much smaller, less powerful rural communities” (Callmer, 1997, p. 15).

According to Lars Jørgensen, part of the explanation for why such sites should have developed in the third and fourth centuries might lie in the Roman Empire’s growing interest in Germanic areas north of its borders (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 87). As noted above, Rome would have desired diplomatic alliances outside its empire to ensure stability. Such contacts existed in southern Scandinavia in the form of traders, mercenaries and magnates. There is a likelihood that these individuals might have had a personal or even family history with Rome and that they could probably even speak Latin, and understood Roman systems and customs (Pohl, 1997, pp. 33-47).

We may also assume that the jewelry deposited at these central places had been used prior to its final deposition (which in many cases seems to have been accidental). We can similarly assume that along with fineries like jewelry which the elite at places like Gudme, and Uppåkra clearly obtained from Rome, there would have also been fabrics and clothing which are now lost. As stated above, already by this time, Germanic peoples on the continent were developing their societies and cultures into something of a hybrid between the Germanic and the Roman. It is not far-fetched to envision that the elite milieu at Gudme and Uppåkra, who deposited/lost Roman artifacts, were, on some level, also dressing or stylizing themselves in accordance with Roman fashion, and even adopting cultural or ideological concepts that were originally Roman as well.

In short, during the third and fourth centuries, at some isolated locations, it seems clear that the pattern of wealth and political control in southern Scandinavia was beginning to shift from that of localized, landed, kin-based governance towards that of a newly emerging, warrior-based elite who belonged to wide-ranging networks of personal contacts, wealth, and power which seem to have expanded well beyond Scandinavia and southward, even as far as Rome

(Hårdh, 2003, pp. 36-37; and Magnus, 2002, p. 27). As these warrior rulers gained further power, controlling more of the distribution of wealth, society at these locations appears to have begun to stratify, with the new elite and their retinue situating themselves at the top and operating out of specific centers of power, such as Gudme and Uppåkra. Furthermore, this milieu appears at an early point to have distinguished itself in various ways from the other locals (including other local rulers) who were less connected to the outside world, less wealthy, less prestigious, and less “elite”.⁸⁶

5.2. The Germanic Iron Age

5.2.1 The Rise of the Successor Kingdoms

As noted in Chapter 2, the Germanic Iron Age covers roughly the fifth to the eighth century, and encompasses the Migration (400-550) and the Vendel periods (550-800). This span of time as a whole is a complex one, in which probably the most important factor was the slow demise of Rome and the rise of its successors. Southern Scandinavia was both directly and indirectly affected by this process, as we shall see.

While Rome had been the single most influential force in Europe during the Roman Iron Age, by the fourth century it had begun to collapse. Between the fifth and sixth centuries, it had come to be more or less replaced in western Europe by a mosaic of new realms (Le Glay, Voisin & Le Bohec, 2009, Pohl, 1997, 33-47). As the Empire broke apart, Germanic people moved south and came to occupy regions that had been Roman for centuries, something that resulted in their becoming further Romanized in the process (Schutz, 1983, pp. 346-347; and Pohl, 1997, pp. 33-47). Those individuals and groups who returned to northern Europe naturally brought these influences with them (Fabeck & Näsman, 2013, pp. 86-87). According to Walter Pohl, those groups and leaders who had learned how to deal with the Romans and knew how to adapt to their model, and adopt it for themselves seem to have been able to establish firmer dominion over their own people and others (Pohl, 1997, p. 34). It is evident that groups like the Franks, Goths, Heruli, Cimbri, Langobards, Vandals, and the Burgundians, many of whom came from

⁸⁶ *Romanitas* is a concept well known among researchers of Roman and Medieval history, referring to the fact that Germanic tribes and individuals seem to have desired “that which is Roman” (Le Glay, Voisin, & Le Bohec, 2009, pp. 364-366; and Pohl, 1997, p. 34). In many ways, we can say that what we are witnessing at Uppåkra and Gudme is a form of *Romanitas*.

Scandinavia, came to dominate the power games in Western Europe throughout the fourth and fifth century, etching new kingdoms out of what had once been Rome.⁸⁷

Eventually, most of these tribes living along the Rhine came to be more or less unified under the Frankish king Clovis, who not only unified the regional kingdoms along the Rhine under his Merovingian dynasty, but went on to expand the Frankish realm throughout much of Gaul by defeating the Visigoths in the 460s (Lasko, 1971, p. 33). The Franks continued to expand at the expense of other Romanized Germanic realms, such as the Burgundians and the Ostrogoths. By the end of the fifth century, the Merovingians had become the new dominant force in western Europe (Pohl, 1997, p. 40-41; Wallace-Hadrill, 1982, pp. 25-48).

The Merovingians and the other Germanic tribes mentioned above, who had inherited power from Rome were all warrior-based aristocracies. As section 5.1 has shown, some of these groups had a history stemming back to the second century in which their early societies, funded and sponsored by the Roman Empire, had become increasingly militarized and stratified (see Willems, 1989, pp. 42-45; Pol, 2013; and Chapter 5.1). Additionally, according to Walter Pohl, at some point many of these groups had come to center around elites who had spent time in the Roman military itself. As Rome gradually weakened, these men were able to wrest kingdoms for themselves out of Rome's old territories,⁸⁸ creating newly formed realms, amalgamating tribes and transcending old borders. The Merovingians, for example, had merged Roman territories with Germanic ones that had previously never been under Rome (Pohl, 1997, p. 42; Wallace-Hadrill, 1982; and Lasko, 1971). Indeed, the Franks had already become something of a Roman/Germanic hybrid, as has been shown in Chapter 5.1, and by taking new territories they brought originally Roman elements further north, effectively moving the Roman/Germanic buffer zone closer to Scandinavia, thereby granting easier access of *Romanitas* to Scandinavians (Hårdh, 2003, p. 42).

5.2.2 Scandinavia During the Migration and Vendel Periods

The Migration and Vendel periods have (perhaps too romantically) been called a “Golden Age” due to the extensive amount of gold objects found in Scandinavia from the time (Stenberger, 1964; Almgren, 1983, p. 14). Without question, some of the most fantastic finds in Scandinavia date from the later Germanic Iron Age just prior to the Viking Age, and it is in this period that

⁸⁷ Pohl, 1997, p. 34-38; Lasko, 1971, pp. 13-24; and Wallace-Hadrill, 1982, pp. 1-48.

⁸⁸ Pohl, 1997, p. 44; Willems, 1989, pp. 33-45; Le Glay, Voisin & Le Bohec, 2009, pp. 542-557; Wallace-Hadrill, 1982, pp. 26-44.

we can see the formation and development of the iconic animal motifs and other uniquely Scandinavian art styles that survive into the Scandinavian medieval period and which became a cultural expression of the Nordic warrior elite (see Jennbert, 2011, esp. pp. 170-175; Hedeager, 2008, p. 13).

In many ways, this was a period defined by new Scandinavian elites who were emulating late Roman culture and traditions as well as integrating tremendous influences from their neighbors, in particular the Merovingians, who succeeded the Roman Empire in the fifth century. In a sense, much of what will be described in the following section can be summarized by saying that as Roman institutions and traditions broke down in the south, parts of them were redistributed north where they were redefined by Scandinavian rulers in a native context.

As described above, as the power of the Roman Empire began to break apart in the fourth and fifth centuries, its social and political power was redistributed both inside and outside of what had once been its borders, as far north as southern Scandinavia. The importance of towns, even within Rome itself, began to decline and new power bases were established in the countryside at large estates which were owned and controlled by local, often warrior, rulers. In post-Roman, times this pattern seems to have accelerated, developing so that the political power structure was based around an ever-consolidating military aristocracy which operated out of estates in the countryside (Helgesson, 2002, p. 38).

This is something that we have already described as taking place in southern Scandinavia during the first couple of centuries AD (see Chapter 5.1) in the development of military empowered estates at sites like Uppåkra and Gudme. In the sixth and seventh centuries, these sites found themselves being joined by an increasing network of similar new types of locations, such as at places like Tissø, Lejre, and Toftegård on Zealand in Denmark, Järrestad in south-east Scania, Uppsala in the northeast of Lake Mälaren in central Sweden, and Lunda in Södermanland in Sweden, to name just a few.

These new elite settlements will be covered in greater detail at the end of the chapter, but for now it is important to point out that the appearance of many new central places form part of an observable shift in the structure of society which took place during the Migration and Vendel periods, which is clearly expressed in the archaeological record. In the Migration period, the numbers of smaller residences of local rulers clearly decreased as smaller governed regions appear to have merged together into more expansive tribal confederations under fewer rulers who controlled more territory (Helgesson, 2002, p. 37; and Hedeager, 1992).

To give a specific example of this: In the previous chapter describing how, during the Roman Iron Age, Scania was divided into various, small tribal groups, with the residencies of

local chieftains being indicated by rich grave goods, with the exception of the region directly connected to Uppåkra. Around Uppåkra there is an absence of rich grave goods, and instead rich material from the settlement itself (Helgesson, 2002, p. 37; and 2004, p. 235; and Hårdh, 2003, p. 42). During the Migration period, the more distant districts surrounding Uppåkra begin to show less rich, chieftain graves, while the rich archaeological finds at Uppåkra clearly increase.⁸⁹ At the same time, the area around Uppåkra seems to have become a major distribution center for gold bracteates (which will be discussed below) as well as gold necklaces for the whole Öresund region. The likely conclusion is that these reflect Uppåkra's influence continuing to spread into the surrounding region to encompass previously small, independent chieftainships (Helgesson, 2002, p. 37).

This pattern of consolidation is seen throughout southern (and central) Scandinavia. In the Migration period, researchers can perceive various differentiating regions evolving, each with their own social and political structure, contacts, and expressions in elite art (Hårdh, 2003, p. 42; and Helgesson, 2002, p. 37). It seems to be that at this time Denmark and Scania possibly came to form one group of tribal confederations while the Mälaren region formed another. We can also see something of a “Danish-Realm” emerging in the late Roman Iron Age or early Migration period of which the Uppåkra region may have been a part of and which, by the end of the Migration period, would have come to include the local ruling centers of Gudme, Tissø, and Lejre (Hårdh, 2003, p. 39 citing Näsman, 1991b, p. 175; see also Hedeager, 1992 regarding the formation of Denmark). Within these larger realms, a network of contacts and power centers, such as the sites mentioned above, seem to have emerged, competed, and exerted influence over one another and their surroundings. This network clearly also extended southward into the continent, and into parts of England, as we shall see.

5.2.3 Southern Scandinavia and its Cultural Contacts in the Migration and Vendel periods

The number of foreign artifacts found in Sweden and Denmark during the Migration period between the fifth and the sixth centuries, reflecting tremendous contact in both personal and trade relations with the continent, particularly with the Merovingian Franks is significant. In this period, imports had clearly increased beyond the level of that which had taken place with

⁸⁹ One explanation for the lack of weapons in graves around Uppåkra is that weapons were manufactured and owned by the elite ruler operating out of Uppåkra, and that when not in use, the weapons themselves remained at the site and were distributed to warriors when necessary (Helgesson, 2002, p. 39).

Rome prior in the Roman Iron Age, and reached its peak in the sixth century, at about the end of the Migration period, before decreasing substantially in the seventh century, (see below).

A good deal of the finds from the Migration period, including imported glassware, gold, garnets, weapons, and specialized ornaments are obviously of a prestigious character, and are usually not considered to be ordinary trade goods. As with those from the Roman Iron Age, they reflect personal relationships on a royal level, and gift exchanges within an aristocratic milieu (Hårdh, 2003, p. 37; and Christensen, 2008, p. 121). Other finds, such as coins, indicate trade contacts but they could also reflect other forms of diplomatic, non-personal relationships, such as peace agreements or payments between Rome and a tribe for various political purposes. Gold in Scandinavia was always imported, so even Scandinavian-made gold crafts such as ornaments, foils, or bracteates represent imports to some extent (Hårdh, 2003, p. 41).

In the fifth century, gold coins of Roman and Byzantine make clearly dominate the picture of the imports into southern Scandinavia, reaching a climax sometime between 450 and 500 (Hårdh, 2003, p. 41). The routes these coins took could be complex, circulating through various tribes or kingdoms before ending up deposited in the ground, so, of course, they do not always reflect direct contact between Scandinavian rulers and Rome or Byzantium. Here it is enough to observe that gold and coins' dispersal throughout southern Scandinavia during the Migration period indicates extensive trade contacts with the continent in both southern and eastern Europe, and that the bulk of minted coins in southern Scandinavia dating to this time originated in either Rome, from the late Roman Iron Age through the Migration period, or else Byzantium, from the fourth century and Migration period (Hårdh, 2003, pp. 40-43). As mentioned above, gold which has been worked into Scandinavian crafts should still be considered an import. In the Migration period, we find locally manufactured gold bracteates (covered below), gold foils, gold necklaces, and other forms of ornaments and objects which were manufactured and distributed in southern Scandinavia as prestige items (Helgesson, 2002, pp. 34-35). These reflect not only local metalworking specialization, but also access to gold as an imported raw material.

While gold bracteates and gold foils are two different phenomena which seemed to have played two different roles in Iron Age Scandinavian society, they both appear during the Migration period, in the fifth century, manufactured at wealthy settlement sites throughout southern Sweden and eastern Denmark. Although the bracteates could also be imported from the continent. As will be covered further below, gold bracteates are, in many ways, an emulation of continental elite culture and are clear evidence for the influence of Roman and Merovingian ideology on, at the least, the material culture of the Scandinavian elites at the time. While these

gold finds are part of what characterize the fifth century, at some point during the late sixth and early seventh century, most of the gold imports come to a halt, as well as the production of bracteates, although gold foil production continues into the Viking Age (Dobat, 2010, pp. 364-366; and Helgesson, 2002, p. 34). The reliance upon imports was replaced in around the seventh century with local manufacturing, as we shall see.

Glass, which had been imported since the Roman Iron Age, continued to be imported throughout the Migration and Vendel periods and after, but was most abundant and varied throughout southern Scandinavia during the Vendel period in particular. The glass shards found from this period primarily come from drinking vessels such as claw beakers, bag beakers and *snartemo* beakers, found also throughout England and the continent (Hårdh, 2003, pp. 38-42). The Merovingians in particular seem to have controlled much of the glass industry, and the design of these drinking vessels reflects Frankish traditions (Lasko, 1971, pp. 20-22). According to Birgitta Hårdh, these glass types should be considered luxury items belonging to a shared elite milieu (Hårdh, 2003, p. 45). More specialized glassware, such as *reticella* and gold-foil glass, has also been found throughout southern Scandinavia. It is important to note that gold-foil glass has almost entirely been found at central places and large trade centers (Hårdh, 2003, p. 45; and Stjernquist, 1990, p. 79).

In addition to gold and glass, many other types of archaeological finds of an aristocratic nature have come to light, such as warriors' equipment, brooches, and ornaments that have a shared style and unknown location of manufacturing, but which are found throughout southern Scandinavia, England, and the continent during the Migration period. A good example is a strap holder from a sword scabbard, made of silver and gilded with *niello*, found in Väst, Sweden, which has parallels in other finds in central Scania and from southern Germany (Strömberg, 1961, p. 89). Many relief brooches show further connections to both the continent and to England (Strömberg, 1961, pp. 90, 96, Jensen & Watt, 1993, p. 197). The finds are diverse in general, and are probably the result of personal contacts rather than trade (Hårdh, 2003, p. 42).

This data is enough to allow us to conclude that there were both trade and personal relationships between the developing aristocratic milieus of southern Scandinavia and continental Europe, in particularly the Merovingians, during the Migration and early Vendel period. In fact, it seems that as in the Roman Iron Age, much of the Scandinavian warrior-rulers' power may have been based on their ability to tap into and integrate themselves into the "elite networks" of continental Europe, which gave them the ability to control the influx of wealth into their own territories and allow them to acquire and display prestige goods which served to strengthen their own position therein. The extended and sometimes intimate

connections between southern Scandinavian rulers and continental rulers during the early Migration period clearly allowed for the steady exchange of ideas and customs within this shared network, as will be shown in Chapter 5.3. This flow of ideas almost certainly helped to create an overlap of culture in which in some ways, both Scandinavian and Merovingian elites shared more ideologically with each other than they might have done with their own local peasants (Lasko, 1971, 41, 58-62; Hårdh, 1993, pp. 38-40; and Steuer, 1989, pp. 100-122).

5.2.4 Scandinavian Consolidation of Power in the Vendel period

As stated above, some of the mutual influences and much of the trade that had developed between southern Scandinavia and the Merovingians seems to have come to some kind of an end or greatly diminished around the beginning of the seventh century. This indicates that a sort of schism may have come between Scandinavian and Merovingian rulers at the time. Much of the importation of gold, and prestigious jewelry, brooches and prestige goods in general, which, as has been shown, had previously been part of a shared network which expanded over large distances between northern and southern Europe during the Migration period, seems to have reached a peak in the sixth century, before collapsing (Helgesson, 2002, pp. 34-35; and Hårdh, 2003, p. 49). Foreign imports become incredibly rare in the early Vendel period and gold, in many places, becomes totally absent (Helgesson, 2002, p. 35). At the same time, however, new forms of locally produced, specialized crafts seem to take over, mostly made out of bronze, and made on site, such as at Uppåkra (Helgesson, 2002, p. 35).

Archaeological evidence suggests that the manufacturing of jewelry particularly, including that of brooches, was now beginning to be take place on a large scale in southern Scandinavia, and locally made brooches seem to have become the most valuable form of object from the period (Helgesson, 2002, p. 35). According to Birgitta Hårdh, brooch production at this time also starts displaying traits of mass production (Hårdh, 2003, p. 48). This locally produced metalwork appearing in southern Scandinavia during the period also demonstrates high artistic and technical skill (Hårdh, 2002, p. 50), and in many ways, begins to express uniquely Scandinavian themes that seem to reflect newly emerging cosmological concepts (Jennbert, 2011, p. 154-216; and Kaul, 1998, p. 14).

It should be noted that right up until the end of the sixth century, strong mutual influences can be seen between southern Scandinavian and Merovingian art. Indeed, the animal styles characteristic of Scandinavian art often also appear in Merovingian art. The same applies

to Merovingian styles and symbols such as on military symbols (see below) are found on Scandinavian art. In the start of the seventh century, however, these mutual influences disappear, as animal art is replaced with more Christian styles among the Merovingians. At the same time many Merovingian elements no longer appear in Scandinavian art (Koch, 1999, p. 183; Hårdh, 2003, p. 39; and Lasko, 1971, p. 26).

Whatever the reasons that led to contact between Scandinavian and continental rulership dissolving during the seventh century, the impact on Scandinavia was that it appears to have found itself more isolated than in previous periods. Whether in response to severed continental contacts, or initiating them in the first place, the Scandinavian elite of the Vendel era had clearly begun to shift their focus towards a more local level. At the same time, rulers in the Vendel period seem to have increasingly consolidated their political, military, and economic power, resulting in the development of many large, new central places with features that reflect the expanding control exorted by the rulers who operated out of them.

As we shall see, the Vendel era is the period when monumental structures were beginning to appear in southern Scandinavia, including grand halls built upon high terraces, richly furnished burials, and an increasing number of increasingly prominent central places, such as Lejre and Uppsala, the seats of the legendary Skjöldungar and Ynglingar (see Chapter 5.3; and Almgren, 1983, pp. 11-16; and Hedeager, 2008, p. 18). Competition was beginning to take place between Scandinavian elites as they consolidated their power and resources, and continued throughout the Vendel period, reaching a peak in the national conflicts of the Viking Age. Before examining this change, however, there is reason to consider the influence that rulership ideology from the south had on the material culture that was evolving in the North at this time.

5.2.5 Influences on Scandinavian Production in the Migration and Vendel periods

As noted above, the evidence for continental, particularly Roman and Merovingian influence on the material culture that was starting to be produced by Scandinavian rulers during the Migration and Vendel periods is extensive. It should suffice here to introduce a few, well-documented examples which offer meaningful insight into how this southern influence impacted on Scandinavian elite society.

Gold Bracteates

As noted above, the gold bracteates of the fifth century are a clear Scandinavian emulation of elite Roman culture. More precisely, they are a clear emulation of the gold medallions that played a role in elite imperial ceremonies and which, with their depiction of the Roman emperor and the inscriptions that accompanied them, were an explicit part of imperial Roman propaganda.⁹⁰ It is apparent that medallions of the type that the bracteates emulate were often given as gifts within a ceremonial context, and some of these have been found in Scandinavia, suggesting direct contact and possible direct participation in these Roman ceremonies by Scandinavians (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 89). As discussed in Chapter 5.1, it is known that Scandinavians, or at least Germanic warriors who served in the Roman armies, could achieve the office of general, and also that they eventually went on to inherit parts of the crumbling empire. In addition, the amount of prestige goods found between Rome, central Europe, and Scandinavia highlighted reflecting a network of personal contacts means it is hardly surprising that we also find Roman medallions within Scandinavia proper.

The bracteates nonetheless indicate that elite rulers within Scandinavia actively started to have the medallions imitated. We can thus assume they were also created for ceremonial purposes, and that, if not direct imitations of the imperial ceremonies in which medallions were given, the ceremonies involved were at least modelled after them. The Scandinavian bracteates, however, soon stopped directly imitating the Roman ceremonial medallions, replacing the profile of the emperor with what might be considered to be various depictions of Scandinavian myth, and with runic inscriptions replacing the earlier Latin inscriptions (Wicker, 2014, p. 26). In short, the Roman symbols of power, including the phrases on the medallions were now being replaced with Scandinavian ones. The bracteates nonetheless indicate that their makers must have understood the Christian, Roman ideology of the fifth century well enough to emulate it, and also that they desired to do so (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 90).

Sword Designs

Anne Nørgård Jørgensen has compared the weapon equipment and customs of southern Scandinavian elites during the period with those of the continent and has suggested that continental, and particularly Frankish influence begins to appear on the military system of the warrior aristocracy that was evolving in Denmark as early as the sixth century (Nørgård

⁹⁰ Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 89; Wicker, 2012, pp. 151-214 and 2014, 25-43; see also Lasko, 1971, p. 60; and Behr, 2007, pp.15-25.

Jørgensen, 1996, p. 96 and 1997, p. 112). It is probable, according to Ursula Koch, that during the second half of the sixth century, many Scandinavians could also have served as warriors in the Frankish army (Koch, 1999, p. 183). Both of the above might be reflected in the fact that Frankish swords and pommels have been found throughout Sweden, not only arriving as imports from the Merovingians (who were responsible for developing and manufacturing them), but also in the form of copies produced in Scandinavian smithies (Arrhenius, 1985, p. 197; and Strömberg, 1961, p. 113). In other words, by the sixth centuries, it is clear that Scandinavian smiths had learned how to reproduce Frankish-style swords, and did so extensively.

As noted above, according to Birgit Arrhenius, during the sixth century, goldsmiths in central Sweden started adopting Frankish status symbols and using them on their own weapons and horse equipment. This is exemplified, according to Arrhenius, by the equipment found in Vendel and Valsgärde graves which is decorated with Frankish *cloisonné* (Arrhenius 1985, p. 197).⁹¹ In the start of the seventh century, however, correlating with the earlier-noted break in contact between the Merovingians and Scandinavian rulership, these influences disappear, meaning that after this time, it is no longer possible to identify Merovingian influence on Scandinavian elite military symbols (Koch, 1999, p. 183; and Hårdh, 2003, p. 39). The *cloisonné* and other metal and gem working techniques however, continue.

Vendel, Valsgärde, and Sutton Hoo Helms

Further influences can be seen in the famous helms found at the graveyards of Vendel, Valsgärde and Ultuna in Uppland, Sweden, as well as the helmet found at Sutton Hoo in England all clearly belonged to a shared milieu of warrior rulers spanning Scandinavia and parts of England during the Vendel era.⁹² According to researchers,⁹³ the styles in which the helms are fashioned is clearly borrowed from Roman and Constantinian guard helmets, complete with their uniquely Romanesque visors, and their crests that are “entirely unknown in the Germanic finds but well known from second and third century Roman parade helmets” (Almgren, 1983, p. 14.). Ambrosiani refers to the helmets as being connected to a class of “supreme warrior lords”, and argues that the rulers who owned them seem to have equated themselves with the emperors and generals of the earlier Roman Empire (Ambrosiani, 1983, p. 24). Whether or not Ambrosiani’s interpretation can be accepted, the helms must be regarded as further clear

⁹¹ The *cloisonné* style will be touched on further in Chapter 6; see also Lasko, 1971, pp. 16-24, 44-45.

⁹² As noted above, these helms will be covered in more detail in Chapter 6.

⁹³ See, for example, Almgren, 1983; Ambrosiani, 1983; Arwidsson, 1983; and Bruce-Mitford, 1974.

examples of rulers adopting and utilizing some part of Roman ideology (Almgren, 1983, p. 13; and Arwidsson, 1983, p. 76).

The fact that the helmets are modelled on Roman helmets might be surprising considering that they were crafted in Scandinavia long after their discontinuation in southern Europe, and at a time when other people in the Baltic and North Sea regions seem to have been using conical helmets (Almgren, 1983, p. 13; and Ambrosiani, 1983, p. 24). Even though all of the helmets in question are from the Vendel period, it is noteworthy that they were found in locations which nonetheless had strong connections with the continent throughout the Migration period prior. It is also worth noting that despite the obvious Roman origins of their design, the helms, like the bracteates described above, use imagery that is clearly of a native Scandinavian origin and which will be touched on in greater detail in Chapter 6.3.2.c.

5.2.6 Southern Influence on Scandinavian Leadership Ideology

As this chapter has demonstrated, much of the wealth and political and military power of the Merovingians was inherited from a collapsing Roman system during the end of the Roman Iron Age and Migration period. This was a system they had previously formed a part of, both militarily and politically, and as these “Romano-Barbaric” rulers inherited power, they brought it northwards, where it became more accessible to groups of people further north. After the collapse of Rome, the Merovingians had clearly become the new “makers of customs”.

During the Migration period and part of the Vendel period, the new aristocracy of southern Scandinavia had tremendous contact with the Merovingians in both political and personal relationships, as has been shown above. High-ranking Scandinavian warriors even seem to have served as retainers in Merovingian courts, and certainly returned to Scandinavia with not only wealth and prestige, but experience from within the Frankish political structure (Koch, 1999, p. 183; Hårdh, 2003, p. 37; and Steuer, 1989, p. 102). This is exemplified, not least in the adoption of Frankish military symbols and reproduction of Frankish weapons within the elite Scandinavian milieu. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the rulers of Scandinavia not only had intimate knowledge of Merovingian military and court customs, they also participated in them, emulated them and even *adopted* them. In this way, according to researchers, the southern Scandinavian societies that neighbored the Merovingians came to become reshaped as emulations of their culture (Hårdh, 2003, p. 42; Fabeck & Näsman, 2013, 87).

In this light, it is interesting to note that much of what we might perceive to be fundamental elements of the social and political structure within the elite milieus of Scandinavia during the Vendel period and Viking Age actually seems to have originated among the Merovingians before moving north.⁹⁴ According to researchers, the Frankish warriors who had become landed aristocrats as part of a late Roman system of property could not maintain paid officers and soldiers, and were thus forced to come up with new ways to maintain their large armies which had previously been paid for with tax revenues under Roman law. As a result, they had to rely on the personal loyalty of free warriors and aristocrats who were drawn to their service by the promise of honor, the distribution of wealth (including prestige goods and the spoils of war), and the granting of land (Pohl, 1997, pp. 43-46). This system eventually developed into a situation in which warrior rulers came to be at the center of a loyal retinue of warriors drawn from an expanding network of various places (instead of merely from their own local community, as had occurred with landed, tribal communities). This created a centralized redistributive exchange system in which these rulers controlled the flow of prestige goods, which were essential for maintaining this new form of social and political organization.

As should be clear from the above, this is the same system that we see among the emerging Scandinavian elite milieu, indeed, it is only natural that they would have adopted it, considering they seem to have, at least for a time, been a part of a shared network of contacts in which gifts, prestige, and political and social ideologies were exchanged among themselves and the Merovingians. Those Scandinavian rulers who were a part of this network would have thus had an advantage within the local systems of older, landed, decentralized chieftainships. Where perhaps other chieftains had limited resources, limited territory, and limited numbers of subjects from whom they could draw support. The newly emerging milieu had access to a far-reaching network of personal contacts from whom they could draw for support. Accordingly, such rulers were in a position to take power and influence away from traditional chiefs as their own power expanded (Steuer, 1989, p. 102). On a general level, as the new model of aristocracy replaced the older one, so must new ideological and religious concepts have come about in order to supplement and legitimize the new model of rulership that had been taken up.

⁹⁴ Pohl, 1997, p. 43; Steuer, 1989, p. 102; Fabeck & Näsman, 2013, p. 87; Hårdh, 2003, p. 37.

5.3. Elite Residencies in Southern Scandinavia in the Germanic Iron Age

In Chapter 5.1 overviews were provided for the sites of Uppåkra and Gudme as they existed in the Roman Iron Age. This section will provide similar overviews for various important central places which developed during the Migration and Vendel eras. Such overviews allow for a detailed look at when the Germanic Iron Age rulers established their residential complexes, how they utilized the landscape around their residencies, and what we can infer about the kinds of activity that took place on their properties. Such overviews put us into a much better position to construct a framework for the ideology that the elites who operated out of these central places might have had. Furthermore, contextually, they will give us an existing frame of reference which we can use when analyzing the evidence for the worship of Óðinn in Chapter 6.

One of the primary features to appear at all of these elite residences is the “hall”⁹⁵ (Herschend, 1993, 1998). This building deserves a little more attention before proceeding. According to the archaeologist, Frands Herschend, the hall was a special kind of building that first appeared around the end of the Roman Iron Age in southern Scandinavia, on the property of rulers. Prototypical frontrunners appeared at places like Gudme, and show clear influences from the Roman *basilica* (Herschend, 1998, pp. 17, 20). The halls of this kind developed as specialized buildings that served in the public and social sphere for those rulers who were wealthy and powerful enough to have one, and are recognizable from a number of features which indicate that they were reserved for ceremonial purposes (Herschend, 1993, p. 182-183). As such, the hall was a place where people from the wider regional community came into contact with the new aristocracy, and engaged in rituals and ceremonies that served to manifest and maintain the power of these new rulers.

Because this section focuses on the Germanic Iron Age, Uppåkra and Gudme will be examined again here, in addition to several newer elite residencies that evolved during this period, such as Tissø, Lejre, Uppsala, and Järrestad. Other sites of relevancy will also be brought up briefly. This section will begin by providing an overview of the various elite complexes and their surrounding settlements, touching on features indicative of “cultic” ritual activity. The cultic features at several of the sites will then be examined in more detail at the end.

⁹⁵ In this thesis, the terms “hall” and “longhouse” are not mutually exclusive, but they are not interchangeable either. A longhouse is, simply put, a long structure that could have served as either a residence or a hall, and in some cases, perhaps both. But while “longhouse” is a descriptive term for a particular kind of structure found in the archaeology, “hall” refers to a very specific type of large longhouse that was prominent both physically and conceptually in the lives and ideology of the warrior aristocrats of southern Scandinavia.

5.3.1 Uppåkra in The Germanic Iron Age

Many of Uppåkra's central features and its history have already been discussed in Chapter 5.1. Additional information on what kinds of contacts the rulers at Uppåkra had and what sort of influence they might have exerted on the surrounding region, up to and into the Viking Age has subsequently been provided in Chapter 5.2. Little more needs to be said about Uppåkra in this section over and above some basic points specific to the Migration and Vendel periods. Uppåkra is unique in its impressive stability and continuity throughout the first millennia. By the start of the Migration period, Uppåkra was already a well-established settlement, from which powerful and influential warrior-rulers operated. This had been the case for hundreds of years before most of the other big central places in Denmark and southern Sweden, with the exception of Gudme, were established during the Vendel period, after the sixth century. It is entirely possible that within the cultural memory of the people living in southern Scandinavia during the Vendel period, the roots of Uppåkra extended far back into a time of legend. As such, it likely served as the model and inspiration for at least some of the features and layouts of the new central places which began to develop at that time, and perhaps especially with regard to the ritual buildings they constructed.

As was noted earlier, by the beginning of the Migration period, the general layout of Uppåkra had already clearly been established in such a way that specialized craft-farms encircled both the residence of the ruler who controlled it, as well as the nearby, special "high timbered" cult-house. The site was also highly militarized, as is indicated by the large depositions of weapons and warrior equipment at special locations both north and south of the cult-house (see Chapter 5.1). Its central economic, military, and apparent religious position suggests it dominated at least western Scania throughout both the Migration and Vendel periods (Helgesson, 2002, pp. 31-32).

As suggested in the previous section, from the end of the Roman Iron Age through the Migration period until about the middle of the sixth century, Uppåkra clearly had far-reaching contacts, as indicated by a diverse array of aristocratic goods found at the site dating from these periods. These include a remarkably large group of gilded or gold ornaments with garnets (Hårdh, 2003, p. 43), as well as silver, gold bracteates, decorative knobs, and gold foils, the raw material for which clearly originated further south (Hårdh, 2002, pp. 42-43; Helgesson, 2002, pp 32-38). The total number of continental ornaments found at Uppåkra from the Migration period is particularly impressive, containing many artifacts whose only parallels exist in far-off

places such as southern Germany or even southern Italy, indicating contacts in these places (Hårdh, 2002, p. 42; 2003, pp. 43-45). However, it is clear that many of the finds were also produced on site, as is evident from the remains of patrices, scrap metal, and partially completed ornaments found there (Hårdh, 2002, pp. 42, 48; and Helgesson, 2002, p. 32).

During and after the sixth century, a period from which a great number of highly skilled metal-work and luxury items formed at Uppåkra are dated, it is noteworthy that they nonetheless start becoming more homogenous, standardized, and “local” suggesting some form of mass-production. Simultaneously, there is now a pronounced lack of gold finds, the primary find category now being comprised of brooches made of copper alloy, once again almost certainly manufactured at Uppåkra or in other local settlements which might have been controlled by the rulership at Uppåkra. (Hårdh, 2002, pp. 42-50; and Helgesson, 2002, pp. 32-38). This shift in production and external trade can be interpreted as reflecting the decrease in continental contacts noted in Chapter 5.2. At the same time, there is a clear effort for consolidation and competition is also being undertaken by the powers at Uppåkra, reflected in the centralization of the production and distribution of luxury goods. By the end of the Vendel period, Uppåkra seems to have been the home of a powerful ruler for several hundred years, and the site appears to have retained this position well into the Viking Age, although that goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

An interesting final point about Uppåkra is that over the course of a series of excavations that began in 2006, evidence came to light of several longhouses, perhaps even halls (although that is uncertain) which had been burned down, along with the skeletons of several burnt victims which were found just west of the cult-house. Clearly, at some point in a space of around 200 years, between the fourth and sixth centuries, at least three buildings were burned to the ground, with people inside of them. Larsson has observed that these burnings are evidence of an armed takeover of the site, with the previous rulers being burned in their homes. What makes this case so interesting is that despite these burnings taking place so close to the cult-house, that building never seems to have been damaged. As Larsson states, this is evidence that, even when social unrest or upheaval occurred, the cult-house retained continuity (Larsson, 2011, pp. 196-198). In short, the implication is that the social and religious significance of the building was preserved even when the social order changed.

5.3.2 Gudme in the Germanic Iron Age

As described in Chapter 5.1, the elite settlement complex at Gudme was established in the third century, making it, along with Uppåkra, very old among central places.⁹⁶ During the Roman Iron Age, the settlement at Gudme, along with the nearby port of Lundeborg, appears to have been characterized by having a tremendous amount of trade with the Roman Empire, allowing the ruler at Gudme to control the flow of prestige goods into the immediate region that Gudme was a part of, and conceivably, other parts of southern Scandinavia as well. It is likely that the ruler at Gudme probably maintained direct personal contact with powerful individuals within the Roman Empire, and oversaw the exchange of goods at Lundeborg and Gudme, as well as the production at workshops located therein which specialized in crafting various kinds of prestige goods. The ruler certainly must have controlled some sort of army, which would have been necessary for protecting the settlement. This same ruler (or family of rulers) probably also built further wealth from the levying of tribute. As a result, a large amount of valuable, imported goods, especially from Rome, along with valuables crafted on site, have been found at Gudme from the Roman Iron Age in the form of hoards and single depositions.

The situation seems to have remained much the same from the end of the Roman Iron Age and throughout the Migration period (400-550). The amount of gold found at Gudme during the Migration period, totaling no less than 8 kg, makes up almost 20 percent of the total amount of gold found in Denmark from that period (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 79). Of the gold from Gudme, much of it is in the form of bracteates which have been found scattered around the Gudme region, as well as in a hoard deposited in a post-hole of a building at Gudme proper (Wicker & Williams, 2012, p. 155; Behr, 2007, p. 21). Another special group of finds from the Migration period is a series of semi-finished gold rivets that were intended for use on the almandine inlay of gold sword pommels. The gold sword pommels in question were obviously crafted onsite and are unique to Gudme (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 82).

There are no large gold finds dating after the sixth century. At the same time, it seems that the elite complex consisting of two buildings which had stood since the third century was closed down and abandoned. The site was subsequently replaced with an ordinary farmhouse. Both Gudme and Lundeborg began to decline at this time and although they continued to retain a position of some importance and maintain some form of valuable craft-production throughout

⁹⁶ As with the overview of Gudme in the Roman Iron Age, unless otherwise noted, this overview follows the more detailed overviews given in Jørgensen, 2009, pp. 332-334; 2010, pp. 273-277; and 2011, pp. 77-89.

the Vendel period and Viking Age, it is clear that the period in which the settlement had thrived (between the third and sixth centuries) was over. According to Jørgensen, it is no coincidence that Gudme and Lundeberg grew dramatically in the third and fourth centuries, the period which was characterized by Gudme's relationship with Rome. Likewise, it is no surprise that they declined simultaneously after the collapse of the Roman Empire (Jørgensen, 2011, p. 88). While it is certainly true that Gudme seems to have at least had trade contact with the Merovingians after the collapse of Rome (during the fifth and sixth centuries), something shown by the discovery of brooches, gold buckles, and gold sword buttons that can be traced to central Europe, but as stated in Chapter 5.2.4, the contact between with the Merovingians and southern Scandinavia seems to have diminished as a whole after the sixth century. It seems that Gudme lost much of its significance at this point, at the same period of time that we begin to see some very prominent power centers, such as Tissø and Lejre beginning to develop, and possibly overtaking Gudme's position of importance.

5.3.3 Tissø During the Germanic Iron Age

As noted above, Tissø is the site of another central place which is located in the western part of Zealand, Denmark, on the western shore of Lake Tissø, between the lake on the east and wetland areas to the west and north. Several waterways connect up with the lake, including Halleby å, a small river just south of the site, giving it a strategic position with regard to water traffic in western Zealand. The archaeological record indicates that in the middle of the sixth century, an aristocratic complex featuring three specialized buildings was constructed at the site. There is no evidence of settlement before that time. During the first half of the seventh century, all three buildings were then burned to the ground. Half a century later, however, a new complex was erected a few hundred meters to the south. The new aristocratic complex remained in use throughout the Viking Age until about the eleventh century when it was torn down and abandoned. Archaeological evidence suggests that during that period, a number of workshops ran along the lake-shore in the form of pit-houses, and along Halleby å there were both workshops and a market. These activities seem to have ceased with the abandonment of the aristocratic complex in the eleventh century (Bican, 2010, p. 148; Jørgensen, 2010, pp. 277-278). The evidence here, however, is not limited to dry land. In the lakebed off the shore where the elite residence had stood, over 50 objects have been found, primarily including weapons such as swords, axes and lances, as well as brooches and tools, all dated to between the sixth

and eleventh centuries. These were ritually deposited in the lake, probably as votive offerings. Several other locations around the elite residence and settlement provide further evidence of cult or ritual activities, will be seen in Chapter 5.4.3 (Jørgensen, 2009, pp. 343-344).

The First Complex at Tissø

The first elite complex at Tissø, located at a place called Bulbrogård, consisted of two longhouses on either side of a smaller building which was connected to a rectangular fenced enclosure in such a manner that the building itself formed the northern-most wall of the enclosure.⁹⁷ A larger palisade enclosed the entire complex.⁹⁸ Only one entrance to the complex has been discovered in the palisade: An opening (3 meters wide) in the southern wall with heavy posts on either side was positioned in such a way that the southern (and presumably main) doorway to the large, main longhouse, clearly a hall, was directly ahead.

As Bican notes, the main hall was 38 meters long, with curving long walls, giving it a width of between 5 and 7 meters. Six pairs of heavy roof-bearing posts ran along its interior, and the building had a total of three doorways. There are also markings that could be interpreted as the remains of a ladder or stairwell, and post-holes situated on the outside of the building which potentially supported a platform, indicating that the hall might have had a second floor. The smaller longhouse was about 23 meters long and between 4.5 and 6.5 meters wide, with only three pairs of heavy roof-bearing posts supporting it. This building might have also been two-storeyed, based on the markings noted above that might have come from a ladder or staircase. The roof-bearing posts in both longhouses sunk about 1.5 meters into the ground, and were much thicker than the roof-bearing posts in most other Iron Age buildings.

The indication given by the post-holes and the evidence for a second floor, is that both longhouses rose to an impressive height. On the interior, and perhaps the exterior, there might have been a gallery or a platform from which the owner (and anyone else permitted to do so) could look down on the activities that would have taken place in the main room of the longhouse (as well as events outside the building). Pieces of wattle and daub covered with whitewash also have been found at both buildings, indicating that they were painted white, both inside and out.

⁹⁷ The description of Tissø in the following section primarily follows that given by Josafine Franck Bican (Bican, 2010, pp. 147-152).

⁹⁸ It is noteworthy that the larger palisade is only preserved in its full length (123 meters) on its southern side, and about 20 meters on the eastern and 78 meters on the western sides remain so there is uncertainty as to exactly how large the palisade was. The suggestion that it ever had a northern wall is guesswork (see Bican, 2010, p. 148).

As stated, between the two tall longhouses there was a third, smaller building which made up the northernmost wall of a connected, fenced-off area. The fenced-off area was about 50 meters long and 21 meters wide, and constructed of heavy rectangular posts. The building itself had four pairs of roof-bearing pillars. The unique size of the fenceposts, and their connection with the house suggests that the house and connected fence had a unique purpose, but there is very little evidence for the activities that would have taken place therein.

As noted above, the entire complex was burned down around the middle of the seventh century, giving it a total span of use of about 100 years, between 550 and 650, during the Vendel period. On the whole, the finds from this complex are sparse, and the possible reason for this will be commented on further below. Nonetheless, the material which has been found is all of an aristocratic nature, including brooches, a sword pommel, a spiral bead of gold, and two gold pendants with inlaid garnets (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 78).

The Second Complex at Tissø

As noted above, around 700 AD, some 50 years after the first complex at Tissø was burned down, a new elite residential complex was constructed about 600 meters further south of the earlier site, at a location called Fugledegård. This new elite residential complex was in use for over 300 years, and was in fact at its most active during this period, before it was abandoned in the eleventh century (Bican, 2010, p. 148; and Jørgensen, 2008, p. 78). As a whole, the activity at Tissø was quite complex during this period, with a very active market and workshop area both north and south of the elite residence. Noticeably absent from the immediate location is any evidence for either agricultural production or permanent livestock. Likewise, there is no graveyard. Interestingly enough, this is also true for the period during which the first complex was in use as well, and will be commented on further below.

The elite residence itself from this second period has been categorized into four phases of change during the period in which it was in use.⁹⁹ The first three phases, spanning a period of 250 years, from the seventh century to about the tenth century, feature a large hall measuring 36 by 11 meters (350 square meters), which stood at the center of the property. Nearby was a fenced-off area with a small building inside of it. During the first two phases, the fenced-off area was actually connected to the hall. It seems that the fenced-off area and the small building

⁹⁹ See more comprehensive reviews of Tissø in Jørgensen, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, and 2010. Most of the details regarding the differences between the four phases are irrelevant here.

enclosed within it were both special and of a religious nature, as will be seen below in Chapter 5.4.3.

North of the hall, positioned along a fence on the edge of the property, there was a pit-house which functioned as a forge and appears to have been active throughout the entire first three phases. Two other pit-houses stood near the hall, on either side of the fenced-off area, which show no evidence of production or utility use, as well as an unusual row of pits which run southwards from the enclosure of the cult-house. The cult-house, three pit-houses, and the row of pits will be covered in greater detail at the end of the chapter, along with all other evidence for ritual activity at Tissø.

The fourth phase, dating from the second half of the tenth century to about the beginning of the eleventh century, was somewhat different in that now the older hall was replaced with a much larger version, measuring 48 meters long and 12.5 meters wide (550 square meters). The new hall was not only massive, it was also constructed in a different style from its predecessor. While the older hall was built with five pairs of roof-supporting pillars running along its interior. The new hall had no roof-supporting pillars, using diagonal supporting beams instead. The fence around the cult-house disappeared in the fourth phase, and the cult-house itself was replaced with a larger building of unknown use.

While not nearly as extensive or as valuable as at sites like Gudme¹⁰⁰ and Uppåkra, the amount of find material at the elite complex itself from the period in which it was in use is clearly indicative of a warrior elite. Weaponry, including hilts, pommels, and other sword parts, as well as arrowheads, bridles and spurs are concentrated heavily around the hall. Meanwhile, as noted above, the lake contains what seem to have been votive offerings, something that will be covered in more detail at the end of the chapter. Shards of drinking glass, coins, and brooches from the Carolingians (the Frankish successors to the Merovingians) as well as over 100 Arabic coins dating between the eighth and tenth centuries have also been found.

Interestingly, the drinking glass shards were found exclusively at the site of the hall. Not a single shard has been found at the workshops or marketplace. There is also an unusually high concentration of amulets and jewelry from both the hall and the fenced-off area with the cult-house, many of which have motifs of a mythic nature (and include Þórr's hammer amulets). These will also be touched on in greater detail at the end of the chapter. At the site of the monumental hall, a large number of remains from animals were discovered, the nature of which

¹⁰⁰ It should be pointed out that the site at Tissø also reflects a different period of time to Gudme and also, to a great extent, Uppåkra. While Gudme and Uppåkra were in their primacy up to about the seventh century, the period during which the second manor was in use at Tissø belongs to the late Vendel period and Viking Age.

lends still further evidence to the aristocratic nature of the site. These include the bones from birds, such as osprey and spoonbill, which would have been very prestigious pets (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 339). Bone remains have also been found belonging to large, slender dogs (probably hunting hounds), as well as horses, which bone analysis has shown were larger than ordinary Danish farm horses from the time. Coupled with the horse equipment found, Jørgensen has concluded that there was probably a heavily-armed cavalry was probably quartered at the place (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 204).

North and south of the elite complex at Tissø, hundreds of small post-holes have been found, along with the markings from temporary fences, pit-houses, nails, small metal-working tools, coins, weights, finished and unfinished material for making knives, shears, strike-a-lights, arrowheads, casting-moulds for brooches (along with brooches themselves), keys, and other forms of jewelry, including, once again, Þórr's hammer pendants. These finds paint a picture of an active marketplace connected to the elite complex at Tissø, where people could purchase or trade for tools, jewelry, and weapons. The buildings themselves seem to have taken the form of temporarily erected booths and stalls. No permanent structures have been found at the location, with the exception of the pits used in the pit-houses, which seem to have been used periodically. The find material from Tissø is much smaller than at locations such as Ribe, Hedeby, Kaupang and Birka, known town-like marketplaces from the same period (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 203). In spite of this, paired with the fact that the marketplace at Tissø was constructed over and again, temporarily, it appears likely that Tissø was a place where short, intense periods of market activity took place, possibly seasonally, drawing large numbers of people who did not ordinarily live at the location.

On the basis of the above, Lars Jørgensen has argued that the elite complex at Tissø was in fact, not a primary residence at all (Jørgensen, 2003, pp. 204-207). Rather, he argues, it was a sort of "royal palace" for a mobile kingship in Denmark. He uses several points of evidence, most of which have been mentioned above. These include the fact that there is an obvious lack of utility or agricultural buildings at the settlement as a whole that are normally associated with a permanent residence, and no graves have been found connected to Tissø.¹⁰¹ The buildings which have been identified are either of a special nature, such as the halls, cult-houses and pit-houses at the elite complex; or else they were part of the temporary structures used in the market. The fact that the market appears to have been an event as opposed to an established

¹⁰¹ Two executed men, however, were buried on the edge of the settlement. These are not normal "graves" however and more the result of judiciary action. This is probably further evidence for the fact that Tissø was the seat of a ruler.

trade-center is also evidence that this was not a permanent residency. The material found which indicates an elite, warrior presence, and the monumental construction of the halls nonetheless confirms that the site was controlled by a powerful, wealthy ruler. The permanent residence of such a ruler, Jørgensen argues, was most likely at Lejre, which will be covered next. As has been stated repeatedly, seems to have become the seat of the powerful dynasty of Danish kings called the Skjoldungar (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 206; 2008, p. 82; see also Chapter 1).

The evidence above indicates that the ruler at Tissø was exactly the type of warrior aristocrat described throughout this thesis. He did not live in western Zealand, where Tissø is located, but the region was an obvious part of his dominion nonetheless, and not ruled over by local chieftains (if it was, they were subservient to him). He was mobile and regularly visited the area as well as other locations with his body of armed retainers, some of whom might have been originally from around Lake Tissø or western Zealand, while others probably were not. When he stayed in Tissø, it can be expected that he drew a large number of people, some of whom must have been very wealthy, politically important and from places of considerable distance.¹⁰² From his monumental hall at Tissø, positioned at the heart of it all, he would not only have overseen the political and economic activities, he would also have overseen, controlled, and perhaps personally headed the religious activities that took place there. As noted above, the evidence for religious activities at Tissø will be covered in greater detail at the end of this chapter.

5.3.4 Lejre During the Germanic Iron Age

The settlement at Lejre is approximately 70 kilometers east of the elite complex at Tissø, located in an area of low-lying hills against the west bank of the Lejre River. It appears to have been established in the sixth century and was active until the eleventh century, contemporaneously with Tissø, which, as has been stated earlier, was probably owned by the ruler who lived at Lejre. A cursory view of the archaeological data at Lejre is enough to indicate that it was indeed

¹⁰² In addition to Arabic and Carolingian coins, a seal from the high-ranking Byzantine official, Theodosius has been found from the market-area of Tissø. According to Jørgensen, "Theodosius was the head of the Byzantine armoury and military recruiting office and from Continental sources we know that he visited Mainz in 840. Identical seals have been found at Hedeby and Ribe and it seems hardly coincidental that a seal has now also been found at Tissø. It has been suggested that this Byzantine official may have been in northern Europe to recruit mercenaries, or to buy up iron for the Byzantine army, which had suffered great defeats in the Near East shortly before this. It would have been natural for Byzantine officials or representatives of Theodosius to have visited places like Hedeby and Ribe on this business as there were plenty of people there and connections and high-level agreements could be established. The archaeological finds show that similar contacts could have been established at Tissø" (Jørgensen, 2003, pp. 203-204).

a large, permanent settlement with a graveyard (which included mounds and stone ship settings, covered in the section on ritual activity at Lejre), agricultural buildings and structures, and workshops. As with the other elite settlements covered in this thesis, at the center of Lejre stood a massive elite hall accompanied by a nearby smaller building, presumably a cult-house, as will be seen below in Chapter 5.4.4. Many of the details regarding the nature of finds at Lejre are familiar to us from what has already been highlighted at Uppåkra, Gudme, and Tissø. Once again, silver and gold hoards as well as drinking vessels and imported goods have all been found at Lejre, making it clear that it was a prominent settlement with a wealthy elite complex at its heart. As these are characteristics that are now familiar to us, there is no need to cover them in as much detail.¹⁰³

The research history on Lejre is more complicated than most other central places, not least due to the fact that it appears in multiple medieval literary sources, including Icelandic sagas, Danish chronicles, and also written accounts which were contemporary to the period in which the site at Lejre was active, all of these have caused Lejre to have long been a part of Danish perceptual history extending back to prehistoric legend.¹⁰⁴ In short, Lejre has “played a central part in Danish history writing for almost a millennium” (Christensen, 1993, p. 163). What is important to note here is that research into Lejre has traditionally, unavoidably, involved written sources, including an ongoing debate regarding the validity of said sources. This chapter is intended to provide an overview of what we know from the archaeological data, as it relates to the development of the settlements of Scandinavian rulers as they relate to religious practice. As such, the written accounts regarding Lejre, most of which having been penned after the period in question, are not relevant here.

The settlement at Lejre appears to have had two elite residential complexes, one succeeding the other, as well as continual settlement in general throughout the Vendel period and Viking Age. The first elite complex, Fredshøj, was established in the early sixth century. It

¹⁰³ The overview of Lejre given here is essentially based on the research by Tom Christensen, primarily that given in his 2015 publication and supplemented with his articles from 1993, and 2008. All other references, and quotes are cited directly.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *Ynglinga saga*, in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 15, 20-23, where a euhemerized Óðinn is said to be the father of Skjöld, who founded the dynasty of the Skjöldungar and who, accordingly, ruled out of Lejre. See also Thietmar of Merseberg, 2001, p. 80: “Because I have heard marvelous things about their ancient sacrifices, I will not allow these to pass by unmentioned. In those parts, in the centre of the kingdom is a place called Leire, in the region of Seeland. Every nine years, in the month of January, after the day on which we celebrate the appearance of the Lord [6th January], they all convene here and offer their gods a burnt offering of ninety-nine human beings and as many horses, along with ducks and cocks - the latter being used in place of hawks. As I have said, they were convinced that these would do service for them with those who dwell beneath the earth and ensure their forgiveness for any misdeeds” (see Thietmar of Merseburg, 1807, p. 12-13 for original).

featured a primary hall, about 47 meters long and between 5 and 7 meters wide with slightly curved walls. The hall was whitewashed and probably tall, with a prominent gable. Beside the hall stood a smaller, well-built building. An area with a layer of depositions, including animals and objects, as well as a pile of fire-cracked stones, were also found near the smaller building. We will see similar culture layers at other sites below in Chapter 5.4. As with the other examples to be covered, this culture layer can be interpreted as a site where ritual depositions took place. The smaller building, likewise, has been identified as a cult-house (see also Jørgensen, 2009, p. 344). Interestingly enough, the hall at Fredshøj was built near a large burial mound, which most certainly must have been intentional. This will be covered in more detail in Chapter 5.4.4, along with the cult-house and other ritual activity from Lejre.

Around the year 600, the elite complex at Fredshøj was closed down for some reason and replaced with a new complex some 500 meters south, at a location called Mysselhøjgård.¹⁰⁵ The new location would remain active into the tenth century. The new settlement was significantly larger at Mysselhøjgård than it had been at Fredshøj. At present, over 50 houses have been discovered, and the settlement appears to have been divided so that most of the dwellings and utility buildings lay southward, with the elite complex positioned on a slope to the north that overlooked the settlement. The main hall was larger and more prodigious than its predecessor had been. It was 50 meters long and 11.5 meters wide, built on a raised terrace, with post-holes indicating that the building probably had a very high, solid gable. Between the position on the hill, the terrace, and the high gable, the building certainly must have been intended to be seen from far off, and monumental in the landscape. The archaeology team that discovered the hall named it the “Lejre Hall”, owing to its impressive size and construction (Christensen, 1993, p. 169). As with before, a smaller building was found nearby, and evidence of ritual activity between the hall and the smaller building have indicated that the building was a cult-house, (see Chapter 5.4.4).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ It may be tempting to look for a correlation between the settlement at Tissø moving south over 500 meters and the settlement at Lejre also moving, but the period of time between the two occurrences (about 100 years) do not allow for the two events to have taken place during the same generation of ruler.

¹⁰⁶ One particular object, found in an area directly between both halls, deserves particular, albeit brief mention here. In 2009, an excavation team discovered a small (1.75 cm high), silver figurine, dating to the tenth century and depicting a figure sitting in a finely detailed seat, and flanked by two large birds that seem to resemble ravens (see Christensen, 2013, pp. 65-78; see also figure 1). The seat appears to depict an actual, elaborately-carved, high backed seat ending in beast heads (possibly an aristocratic high-seat) and the figure sitting in it appears finely dressed, perhaps, as Christensen, suggests, wearing inauguration robes (Christensen, 2013, p. 68). The combination of the flanking birds and the elaborate throne are interesting and must in some way have mythical connotations due to the unrealistic presence of two ravens on the high-seat (normally rulers aren't accompanied by ravens). There is (and will always be) a debate over who or what the figure depicts. Christensen suggests that it is Óðinn, based primarily on the presence of the two ravens (Christensen, 2013, p. 68). Hedeager identifies the figure as Óðinn sitting in his seat Hliðskjálf (Hedeager, 2015, p. 146). Lasse Sonne

At some point around 900 AD, it seems that the “Lejre Hall” was closed down and yet another new hall was built on the southern part of the hill. Interestingly, a casket was found, buried at the very center of the old hall, containing a man who had died between the ages of 35 and 50. The grave was furnished sparsely with a knife with a silver-wrapped handle and gold-embroidered ornaments. Interestingly, the old hall is surrounded with other graves which have been dated to the period after it was closed down. Christensen has thus suggested that the old hall might have been a burial gift for the man in the coffin. Clearly, he must have been important, probably having been the ruler of Lejre at one point (Christensen, 2015, p. 145).

The new hall lasted through what archaeologists have referred to as a “transitional phase” in which Lejre’s status as a royal center of importance was slowly replaced by a nearby village of Roskilde in the eleventh century. Roskilde, it might be noted, featured a church from an early point in its development, while at the old center at Lejre, the landscape was infused with pagan elements, including stone ship-settings, mounds, and even the halls themselves (Christensen, 2008, pp. 124-125). As such, researchers have suggested that Lejre was connected with the old heathen power-structure, while Roskilde was a part of the new Christian world (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 182; and Christensen, 2008, pp. 121-125). This suggestion underscores how securely the aristocracy at Lejre, like those in Tissø, Gudme, and Uppåkra, must have interwoven religious elements with their claims to legitimacy. This may also be the reason why no church was ever constructed at the site of the Lejre elite residential complex after it was abandoned. Perhaps it was too strongly connected to the old heathenism.

has meanwhile challenged the identification of Óðinn on the basis that, essentially, we cannot apply late mythic names and images to archaeological objects because we can never be sure what that object might have meant contextually to its creator (Sonne 2011, pp.32-39). The connection between the figure and Óðinn is tempting, and the fact that it has two eyes does not affect this interpretation (see Chapters 6.3.4 and 7), since those elements connected to Óðinn in the later Icelandic sources might not have been present in the tenth century. Nonetheless, it should also be stressed that the tenth century is quite late with regard to the time period focused on in this thesis (primarily the Migration and Vendel eras). One can also expect that if the figure is meant to represent Óðinn, then the Óðinn in question was probably quite different from the Óðinn known in the period under discussion here.



Figure 1. Silver figure from Lejre (from Christensen, 2013, p. 66)

5.3.5 Uppsala in the Germanic Iron Age

The research history of Gamla Uppsala is extensive, in part because, like Lejre, Uppsala appears in medieval written records, already as a place of ancient legend.¹⁰⁷ If the written forms of skaldic poetry such as *Ynglingatal* are to be treated as authentic relics of oral history from the Viking Age, then it is clear that even in the Viking Age, the heathen kings of Vestfold in Norway traced their ancestry back to Uppsala and the legendary dynasty of the Ynglingar.¹⁰⁸ As early as the seventeenth century, the background history of Uppsala was a subject of intense academic debate and it has been used in many models of study, including that of sacral kingship (see Chapter 3.1). The objective in this section, as with that on Lejre, is to set aside the many layers of academic discourse which enshroud Uppsala, and look at the site purely from an archaeological perspective with a focus on questions relating to this study. To that end, due to Uppsala's location on the periphery of the area in question (southern Scandinavia) and the fact that extensive research is still ongoing at the site, it will only be touched on briefly.¹⁰⁹

The settlement at Uppsala is located in central Sweden, in the northern part of the Lake Mälaren water system. According to John Ljungkvist and Per Frölund, by the Migration period, the Uppsala region already appears to have been a fertile and densely populated area, but does not exhibit any apparent centralized production or extraordinary displays of wealth or power like what we have seen at places like Uppåkra, Gudme, Lejre and Tissø. It is during this period, between the fourth and seventh centuries, and particularly after the sixth century, that the settlement pattern in the area began to change. Older, more scattered settlements began to be abandoned while new concentrations of settlement developed around the site we now call Gamla Uppsala. Ljungkvist and Frölund speculate that these changes in settlement patterns reflect changes in the social structure in the region moving from an agrarian, decentralized system towards something more centralized and more militarily focused (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, pp. 6-9). Their suggestion fits well with the patterns highlighted throughout this thesis, and it seems likely that we are once again dealing with the evolution of an elite milieu

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, *Ynglingatal*, in *Poetry from the King's Sagas I; Ynglinga saga* in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 11-16; Saxo Grammaticus, 1979, p. 172; Adam of Bremen, 1917, pp. 257-259.

¹⁰⁸ On the dating of *Ynglingatal*, see for example, Skre, 2007, pp. 407-429; and Sundqvist, 2005, 87-124. See also Chapter 3.1 for an overview of past dating attempts.

¹⁰⁹ The most comprehensive overview of the development of social and political environment at Uppsala can be found in Sundqvist, 2002. The overview of Uppsala here primarily follows that given by Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, except for where otherwise referenced.

with personal contacts extending across central Sweden into southern Scandinavia and the North Sea region (if not further). This perspective is supported by the evidence discussed below.

As noted above, by the late sixth century, there definitely appears to have been a sort of elite rulership operating out of Uppsala, coinciding with the beginning of a period in which dynamic transformations took place over several generations of rulers. The settlement around the elite complex was built up during this time, becoming increasingly monumental, on a scale that seems to have been grander and more ambitious than the other sites covered in this thesis (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, p. 10). It is noteworthy that due to the research of Sune Lindqvist, the various “Kings Mounds” at Uppsala, have long been thought to have been much older, constructed during the fifth and sixth centuries, belonging to supposed “peaceful priestly kings”.¹¹⁰ These mounds have been reinterpreted using modern excavation and chronological methods. As a result, the dating of the mounds has been moved to the Vendel period, and particularly the sixth and seventh centuries (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, p. 6). At the same time that the mounds were being established, just to the north, on the highest part of the area multiple, massive artificial terraces of clay, stone and turf were built which lifted the land even higher and served as foundations for a cluster of monumental buildings. Among these stood a great hall on one terrace with a smithy on a second terrace beside it. Here, archaeologists have found gold, silver and amber debris, and over 600 garnets. Several other terraces supporting the foundations for a second smithy and multiple as of yet unidentified, raised buildings, have also been found (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, p. 22; see figure 2).

As noted above, the hall at Uppsala mentioned above was massive, measuring 50 meters in length with a strongly curved double layer of walls measuring between 4 and 12 meters wide, making the building much wider at its center, with narrow gables on the ends. The building has been dated to sometime between the end of the sixth century or first half of the seventh. The exterior wall of the hall at Uppsala was lined in clay, and the interior wall had been plastered with lime mortar and painted white. It is uncertain how many roof-bearing posts the building had, but it has been suggested that there were at least four pairs. An interesting feature unseen at the other sites is that each doorway was a double-door, with two door blades instead of one, and measuring about 3.5 meters in width. The hall had two pairs of such doorways, facing one another on either end of the long hall. The building was sectioned into three parts: the northern and southern ends, with their doorways, serving as entrance rooms, and a central hall of about

¹¹⁰ Lindqvist, 1936; 1949, pp. 33-48; see also Ambrosiani, 1983, p. 18. See also Chapter 3.1 regarding past historians who applied the ideas of sacral kingship to Uppsala.

26 by 8 meters (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, pp. 16-18). The roof-bearing posts indicate that the building was very high, and it might have been two-storeyed, again, analogous with that which we have seen at Bulbrogård (see Chapter 5.3.3)

A few artifacts have indicated that the building itself was highly decorative. These include a spear-shaped door-hinge, found in a post-hole, and a volute-shaped, double-spiraled piece of metal that appears to have been a part of building decoration (Ljungkvist & Frölund, pp. 16, 20). As stated earlier, the interior wall was painted white. It almost certainly was further decorated, perhaps with tapestries.

At the end of the great hall's period of use, sometime around 800 AD, it appears to have been intentionally and ritually burned down. After the building was burned, it appears as if the site was then cleared of debris, filling the post-holes with hinges, nails, and rivets. Unburnt bones belonging to cattle and horses were found scattered over this cremation layer, indicating either that the animals were led to the site and slaughtered on the spot, or else slaughtered and brought directly to the place. As they were uncooked, they obviously were not a part of any ritual meal before being deposited. Lastly, in a final act, a layer of clay was placed on top of all of this as a form of sealing layer. The entire process must be viewed as having been a ritual which included the sacrifice of animals.

According to Ljungkvist and Frölund, the cremation of the hall at Uppsala resembles human funerary rites (Ljungkvist & Frölund, 2015, p. 19).¹¹¹ Interestingly, animal bones dating to 1022-1150 have been found at the site above the layer of clay. These were placed there well after the house was abandoned, and indicate a long cultural memory of the importance of the hall, lasting at least 150 years. As is well known, Adam of Bremen, writing in the eleventh century, claimed that a great building (a *templum*, or temple) stood at Uppsala containing statues to Óðinn (Wodan), Þórr (Thor), and Freyr (Fricco). As yet, however, no archaeological excavations have revealed any other buildings as having been constructed on the terrace of the hall after the burning (until at least the late medieval period), which has raised questions about the validity of Adam's account. All the same, it should be noted that beneath the church that currently stands at Uppsala, just south of the terraces described above, very large post-holes have been found which are similar to those from the great hall described above, along with what appear to be stone pavements, and other signs of older construction (Ljungkvist & Frölund 2015, p. 9). While it is difficult to tell for certain exactly what kind of building (or buildings if

¹¹¹ The animal bones have been dated to 772-876, indicating that was the period of time in which the building was burnt down.

they come from multiple structures, including an older church or churches which might predate the current church) stood there, it is possible that when the great hall described above was burned, it was replaced with a new one at this location (Alkarp & N. Price, 2005, p. 261-272). If this is the case, then this could be the structure which Adam was referring to.

In short, Uppsala demonstrates a continuation of the pattern thus far highlighted in which during the Migration and Vendel period, showing a particular elite milieu beginning to manifest its power and utilize the landscape immediately connected to their dwellings, raising monumental halls as part of this. As noted above, the hall at Uppsala has clear parallels with those which we have seen at Bulbrogård at Tissø, and in Lejre, not only in terms of the time in which monumentalizing occurred, but with regard to the design of the halls in question. As we have seen at these other locations, researchers have pointed out that the period of time in which Uppsala was showing signs of an elite milieu flexing their muscles was also a time at which the Mälaren region was becoming increasingly part of a social, political and economic North Sea network (Ljungkvist & Frölund, p. 26; and Ljungkvist, 2008, pp. 263-284). It seems clear the old perception of Uppsala as the seat of peaceful agrarian kings should be abandoned in favor of a new contextual perspective suggesting that the rulers at Uppsala were part of the earlier-noted network of newer, warrior-rulers with far reaching contacts that has been described throughout this chapter.

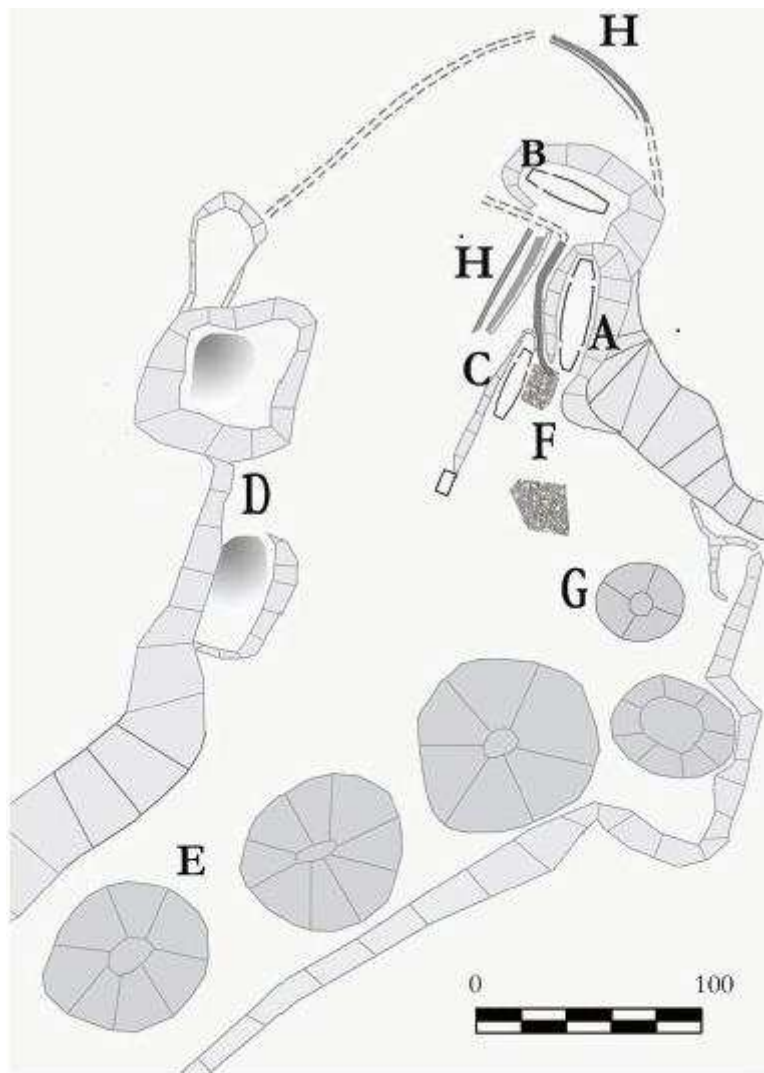


Figure 2. A simplified map of the seventh century complex at Uppsala, based on present knowledge about the area.

- A. Southern terrace, the great hall.
- B. Northern terraces with large workshop building, at which 600 garnets were found.
- C. Western terrace, second workshop building and unknown building structures.
- D. Two concentrations of graves.
- E. Högåsen cemetery with the three kings' mounds and the so-called Thing mound.
- F. Two known areas of stone pavement.
- G. North mound.
- H. Identified walls and/or road constructions (image and text from Ljungkvist & Fröhund, 2015, p. 13).

5.3.6 Järrestad in the Germanic Iron Age

A number of other locations will now be briefly discussed, not least because they offer further parallels to various features noted at the sites described above. Due to the restraints of this thesis, it has been important to prioritize most important central places in Scandinavia. These following sites will not be given such comprehensive of overviews, because they do not seem to have as direct a relationship to the subject at hand as the sites described above. They also generally seem to have been somewhat smaller than those previously discussed. As a result, the following sites will be discussed only to the degree that they relate to the picture that has thus far emerged.

Järrestad is located in the south-eastern corner of Scania, over 80 kilometers east of Uppåkra (see Chapters 5.1.3 and 5.3.1). As stated earlier in this chapter, some scholars have noted that while large parts of western Scania were centralized under the rulership located at Uppåkra, eastern Scania, on the other hand, seems to have been dominated by a number of smaller central places that, while certainly being centers from which wealthy and powerful individuals operated, seem to have lacked the ability to control areas as large as those controlled by, for example, Uppåkra. Järrestad appears to have been one such place (Hårdh, 2002, p. 62).

The full details of the settlement at Järrestad are not well known as the site has not been greatly investigated. However, what can be said is that the settlement was situated on a low plateau, nestled between marshy land and low-lying hills, about 3 kilometers from the coast, at a junction in a river-valley that appears to have been favorable for communication lines and traffic in the Germanic Iron Age (Söderberg, 2003, pp. 285-286).¹¹² Järrestad was therefore in a strong strategic position to capitalize on the flow of traffic to and from the sea.

The central parts of what have been identified as an elite residential complex have been excavated, providing evidence for activity dating to between about 500 to 1050 AD. It seems that around 700 AD (slightly later than the Uppsala complex), a hall and an accompanying fenced enclosure that was either attached to the hall directly, or very close to it, were both constructed, as well as a smaller, well-built building which was placed inside the enclosure. They appear to have all been constructed at the same time, which indicates that all three, the hall, the fence, and the building inside the fenced area were intended from the beginning to operate as a complex. Nearby marshlands appear to have been used for the construction of a series of wells. Inside of the wells, animal bones have been found which appear to have been

¹¹² The overview of Järrestad is based on that of Söderberg, 2003, pp. 283-310, unless specifically cited.

ritually deposited. The evidence for ritual activity at Järrestad will be discussed in more detail later.

The elite complex at Järrestad is strikingly similar to that which was found at Tissø (but also offers parallels to Gudme, Uppåkra and Lejre). As Söderberg has pointed out, the layout of the hall at Tissø in phases one and two, and the layout at Järrestad which was constructed during that same period of time can almost be described as carbon copies (Söderberg, 2003, p. 293). As has been seen previously, settlements tend to go through periods of restructuring and rebuilding, which researchers categorize as phases. At Järrestad, the hall seems to have been increasingly monumentalized over the span of time it was active. The oldest hall in Järrestad (from around 700) measured about 37 meters long and 7 meters wide. The youngest (from around 1000) was effectively twice as big, measuring 50 meters long and 14 meters wide. As in Tissø and Lejre, it seems to reflect a move to gain attention.

In general, the amount of finds at Järrestad are quite scarce compared to other locations. This may be due to the site's limited research history, or, as seems most likely, it may simply be that Järrestad was not as wealthy as the larger sites. Nonetheless, as noted above, Järrestad exhibits characteristics which demonstrate a shared ideology between its own rulers and those at places such as Lejre and Tissø. It has even been suggested that the elites operating out of Järrestad were in close personal contact with the ruler at Tissø (which we have identified as being associated with Lejre), perhaps even through family relations (Söderberg, 2003, pp. 293-294).

5.3.7 Toftegård in the Germanic Iron Age

Toftegård is another elite residential complex which was situated on the island of Zealand in Denmark. It was active from about the beginning of the seventh century until some point in the tenth century (Tornbjerg, 1998, pp. 217), in other words, parallel to Lejre and Tissø. There, the remains of over 50 buildings have thus far been unearthed, situated around a central elite residence where about 5 large longhouses have been found. Adjacent to one of the longhouses is once again a fenced-off area enclosing an area featuring one small building. This layout is analogous with the fenced off cult-houses that we have seen, for example, at Tissø, Lejre, and Järrestad. We may thus assume that the longhouse with the fence and cult-house was a hall, as has been seen at the other sites under discussion (Tornbjerg, 1998, pp. 217-232).

The wealth of the elite milieu at Tofttegård is clear once again from the many prestige goods found at the complex, which once again include weapon parts, gilded silver and bronze jewelry pieces and mountings, coins, bars of silver, riding equipment, and glass vessels of Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon origin. Interestingly enough, gold foils have been found in the post-holes of one of the longhouses, and additional foils have been found in the topsoil at the site, similar to the situation at Uppåkra. Many pits containing fire-cracked stones, with an otherwise unknown function have also been found. These are very similar to the pits found at Tissø (Tornbjerg, 1998, pp. 217-232).

5.3.8 Helgö and Sorte Muld in the Germanic Iron Age

The first-generation sites of Helgö,¹¹³ an island in Lake Mälaren, and Sorte Muld, on the island of Bornholm off the coast of Scania, also deserve a brief mention due to the references made to them earlier in this chapter, and in Chapter 3. Both sites were established in the Roman Iron Age, around the same time as Gudme and Uppåkra, but appear to have been much smaller, neither being home to halls of the size noted above. However, both Helgö and Sorte Muld appear to have been the residencies of members of the same type of centralized elite milieu described as operating out of the other central places described here. Both Helgö and Sorte Muld also appear to have been production sites, and both have revealed a number of wealthy finds, including gold foils. Interestingly enough, Helgö also appears to have contained a small cult-house, similar to that found at Uppåkra, although beginning at a somewhat later date, from the sixth to the tenth century. Here, 26 gold foils and two gold bracteates have been found, along with a silver bowl and shards of Frankish glass dated to the eighth century. As its name suggests, the site at Helgö had a sacred impression. The same might be said of Sorte Muld. According to Watt, Sorte Muld was a place where the elite residency attempted to operate cult functions alongside the site's role in the production of elite goods (Jørgensen, 2009, 334-335; 336-337; Watt, 1991, 105-107; see also Fabech & Näsman, 2013, pp. 59-60).

¹¹³ Helgö's name means "Holy Island", indicating that from an early point, the landscape may have been associated with liminality.

5.4. Cult-Houses and Locations at Iron Age Central Places

As shown above, it is evident that the Germanic Iron Age (including the Migration and Vendel periods) saw a development in southern Scandinavia in which a new breed of elite ruler consolidated power in central sites around monumental halls that were often closely connected with buildings that have been termed “cult-houses”. The implication is that their power was not only political and economic, but also stressed by means of cult activity. In the following section, the focus will be on the evidence for this at some the sites in question. Not all of the sites described above will have their cultic features covered below, either because the evidence is still forthcoming and not enough for a specific section to be dedicated to them, or because they did not have the said features.

It is admittedly problematic to decide which elements of an elite complex can be classed as “cultic” and which cannot. Nonetheless, in most cases, the implications are clear. It is also evident that, as will be shown at the end of this chapter, the cultic aspects of these locations were clearly interrelated with the political.

5.4.1 Evidence for Ritual Activity at Uppåkra

As was stated in Chapter 5.1.3, a special building stood at the center of the settlement of Uppåkra from about the third century in the Roman Iron Age and throughout the entirety of the Migration and Vendel periods. Throughout this time, this building was maintained and rebuilt many times, probably roughly every 80 to 100 years according to Larsson & Lenntorp, who have published a detailed survey of the house sequences (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 38). Of particular interest is that the basic structure of the building was retained throughout this long period of time with only minor changes being made in later generations of the house (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 17; Jørgensen, 2009, p. 336). It can be said then, that while the “house” was, in reality, several generations of houses spanning at least 700 years, it was nonetheless rebuilt and upkeep in such a way that its original features were maintained, even to a point where it may have begun to appear archaic to later generations.

To summarize its main functions, the building, which has been interpreted as a cult-house, was a stave-building (a building technique seen also on the famous “stave-churches”; see Olsen, 1966, p. 282) measuring approximately 13.5 meters long and between 4.5 and 6 meters in width with a floor diameter of about 75 square meters, with convex long sides and

straight gables, (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, pp. 6-13, 17; and Jørgensen 2009, p. 336). It had three entrances; two at the southern end and one at the north. The interior of the building also featured two pairs of massive, central roof-supporting pillars. It has been noted that the post-holes for the pillars of “House 2”, the youngest of the stave buildings, lasting from the end of the Vendel period into the Viking Age (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 7) measured 4 by 2 meters in area and were at least 1.7 meters deep, which is according to Larsson & Lenntorp, “impressive”. According to various scholars, this indicates that the building itself would have been much taller than most Iron Age buildings.¹¹⁴ If we consider its comparatively small diameter compared to the halls described in the previous chapter, the unnecessary height of the building must have made it particularly unique in appearance.

It is worth bearing in mind that the tall stave-building had a commanding position in the otherwise flat landscape around Uppåkra (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 80), standing on the edge of a ridge in the highest part of the settlement, which would have made it visible over a large area from the southwest to the southeast. Just 5 meters to the east of the cult-house is an area containing the remains of several residential longhouses, including post-holes and fire-pits (Larsson, 2006, p. 251; and Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 3). The rich finds discovered in the remains indicate that the longhouses belonged to the elite milieu at the site (Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 80). At least one of them might have been an actual hall. It is also worth noting that west and north of the building there were four Iron Age burial mounds, two of which are still standing. According to Larsson, “these mounds were obviously respected by the Iron Age citizens of Uppåkra, and it is likely that they played an important role in the social and religious life of the community” (Larsson, 2006 p. 251).

Other features of the surroundings of the cult-house also point to it having had a cultic significance. The yard surrounding the cult-house contains several unique features which have been documented in detail by many researchers.¹¹⁵ Just outside of the building, near the western gable, are the remains of fire-cracked stones and animal bones found in a contained area of about 5 meters. Due to its location, this unusual feature probably indicates that the animals cooked here played a part in rituals associated with the building. In addition to this, just south of the fire-cracked stones lies a 40-square-meter area of pavement. At least half a dozen millstone fragments were used in the pavement, and a Þórr’s hammer amulet has been found within. The paved area seems to have been in use around the Vendel period and early Viking

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 30; and Jørgensen 2009, p. 336.

¹¹⁵ Larsson, 2002, pp. 24-28; Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, pp 40-41; Larsson, 2006, pp. 250-251; Hårdh, 2002, p. 46; Jørgensen 2009, pp. 335-336; Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 80; and Helgesson, 2004, pp. 223-239.

Age. It has been suggested that the choice of material used here was religiously deliberate: Quern stones are often found deposited in a ritual context, and apparently played a cosmological role, as several scholars have attempted to explain (Hultkrantz, 1991, p. 41; and Zachrisson, 2004 pp. 243-287). While the Þórr's hammer pendant's connection to religion is more obvious, such pendants are naturally not uncommon in other contexts as well (Abram, 2011 pp. 5-6). Nonetheless, the likelihood is that the paved section of the yard of the cult-house had a sacral purpose.

Even more indicative is the fact that to the north and the south of the cult-house are the two large concentrations of weapons and warrior equipment, mentioned in Chapter 5.1.3, which were ritually deposited over most of the period of time that the building stood, that is, from shortly after the settlement was established until the eighth century. This, of course, adds further weight to the suggestion that it was a place of offering (Helgesson, 2004, pp. 225, 231).

As stated previously, most of the weapons from the deposition to the north, consisting mostly of spears and lances, were subjected to brutal, ritual destruction before being buried. It is nonetheless worth noting though, that other warrior equipment of a more prestigious character than the destroyed weapons has also been found around the cult-house. A fabulous eyebrow arch that would have belonged to an elaborate helm, and two mountings shaped like pigs, were found south of the building, both dating probably from the Vendel period. The eyebrow arch will be covered in more detail in Chapter 6.3.2.c in relation to its possible connection to rituals that might have been related to Óðinn. A sword pommel inlaid with gold and silver, and a sword haft with gold and garnets have also both been found south of the building, both dating from the early ninth century. These more magnificent pieces of warrior equipment, while not fully intact artifacts, all lack signs of ritual destruction and appear instead to have been dismantled and deposited, reflecting a different form of treatment from the brutal treatment of most of the equipment deposited during the Roman Iron Age and shortly thereafter (Helgesson, 2004, p. 231).

Other types of artifacts have also been found inside the cult-house itself. These have been extensively analyzed,¹¹⁶ and once again underscore the building's unique position in the social and religious landscape of Uppåkra. Most striking, as of 2004, are the at least 122 gold foils which have been found inside the building, stemming from over 50 dies, and constituting

¹¹⁶ Larsson, 2002, pp. 25-28; Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, pp 12-42; Larsson, 2006, pp. 249-251; Hårdh, 2002, pp. 42-52; Jørgensen 2009, pp. 335-336; Fabech & Näsman, 2013, p. 80; and Watt, 2002, pp. 167-221.

the second largest collection of foils found in Scandinavia (Watt, 2004, p. 170).¹¹⁷ Many of the foils were clearly manufactured at Uppåkra, not far from the cult-house. It is worth noting that almost all of the gold figures were found along the wall trenches or post-holes with two concentrations of foils proving to be particularly thick: those at the northwestern roof-supporting pillar, and those by the eastern gable, particularly in the central part of the gable and at both of its corners.¹¹⁸ There is little question that something of importance must have been in each of these locations during the period in question. It should also be noted that the gold foils are only found within the more monumental version of the cult-house which was constructed during the Migration and early Vendel period, in other words, the building referred to as “House 2” above (Watt, 2004, p. 169).

Another important item found in the cult-house is a beaker made of copper alloy and silver with embossed gold foil bands wrapped around it depicting zoomorphic motifs. This was found deposited alongside a glass bowl made of two layers of differently colored glass. The bowl has a clear under-layer with a cobalt blue overlay fashioned so that the blue glass forms a pattern like the pedals of a rosette (Hårdh, 2006, pp. 254; and Larsson, 2009, p. 240). Both items were found buried beneath the clay flooring of the building near the fireplace situated in the center of the building. It is interesting to note that the clay flooring was replaced after the objects were deposited. Because of the careful manner in which they were deposited and then covered, it seems that the deposition must once again have been a ritual one, and that the two were treated as a pair. The style of the gold foil on the beaker and its general shape dates it to about the year 500. Also worth noting in this context is that other shards from beakers and bowls have been found in the building belonging to a total of ten separate vessels (Larsson, 2009, p. 240).

Various other unique items which might have been associated with cult activity have also been found in or very near the cult-house. These include many small gold items, including

¹¹⁷ The largest collection of gold foils is from Sorte Muld on Bornholm, which has been demonstrated to have strong connections with Uppåkra, not least because both locations share many gold foils that were made from the same die (see Watt, 2002).

¹¹⁸ Larsson has suggested that the gold figures (also known as *guldgubber*) might have been pressed against the central pillars described above, based on their location and apparent connection with the pillars. He has also suggested that a post covered in gold foils in the cult-house might have been symbolic of the tree Glasir, which, in *Skáldskaparmál*, is said to have had golden foliage and stood before the doors of Valhöll. (Larsson, 2006, p. 251; *Skáldskaparmál*, p. 41). Whether or not this was ever the case, it does seem clear that the gold figures appear to have been an expression of elite rulership ideology with connections to both law and religion, exemplified not least by their apparent relationship with the central pillars in the Uppåkra cult-house described above, as well as from their presence at several other sites described in this thesis. For more information on gold figures, see Ratke, 2009; Ratke & Simek, 2006, pp. 259-266; and Watt, 2004, p. 167-221.

a pendant, a socket, a capsule containing granulated decoration, as well as gold bars, coils, and sheets (some of which are crudely anthropomorphic). These have been found in the fills of the roof-supporting posts, again implying deposition. Two, four-knobbed door rings have also been found. One was in the fill of the northwest roof-supporting pole, while the second was found in the soil outside of the cult-house. It has been argued that such door rings were symbolically important, and that such knobs are also common on the door handles of Romanesque doors from this time period reflecting potential cultural influence. On the Romanesque doors in question, the knobs seem to have been in groups of three, indicating a holy trinity (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 40). It has been argued that the fact that similar knobs are present on the rings found at Uppåkra indicates a possible overlap of ideas (Ödman, 2003 p. 95). The fact that here there are four instead of three could mean that the four knobs also represented something in pre-Christian cosmology. The deliberate deposition of one of the door rings inside the filling of the roof-supporting pillar would seem to be further evidence that the ring was symbolically important in some way.

Lastly, and perhaps surprisingly in the category of special finds relating to the cult-house, is a concentration of at least 19 nails, all of which were found in a small pit formed by the removal of the posts belonging to House 2. What makes the nails unique is that structures such as the buildings at Uppåkra did not require much support from nails, although it is true that some objects on the interior might have needed this (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2004, p. 29). However, the small area in which the nails were found and their high concentration, by the northern wall, indicates that they were intentionally collected and deposited this way and are not stray finds. Their deposition was thus once again ritualistic in some way, and, in context of this building, definitely worth mentioning.¹¹⁹

All of the above features, in addition to the fact that the building shows no signs of having ever been lived in, underline its probable cultic role. Its close association to the hall suggests that it was controlled and or presided over by the ruler in question.

5.4.2 Evidence for Ritual Activity at Gudme

The same phenomenon occurs at Gudme. As described in Chapter 5.1.4, two prominent buildings stood at the center of the Gudme settlement from the second half of the third century

¹¹⁹ One is reminded of *reginnaglar*, appearing in Icelandic literary texts in various contexts which seem, not least because of their name, to have had a religious function which is now obscure. See Simek, 2007, pp. 262-263. For the most detailed description within an Icelandic literary context, see *Eyrbyggja saga*, 1935, p. 8.

until the sixth century.¹²⁰ The primary building, a monumental hall which served as a residence of the elite at Gudme, stood for about 100 years before being ripped down and replaced with a smaller one. The second building which remained standing and active throughout the entire period in question seems to have been used only for ritual purposes associated with the hall. As with the cult-house in Uppåkra, archaeological remains from the buildings themselves and from the surrounding landscape indicate that neither this secondary building nor the sequence of halls were used for the production of foodstuff or any form of craftsmanship. On the contrary, both buildings appear to have been a part of a complex which included both themselves and their yard, as well as a low-lying area just south-east of the buildings that was either on the edge of a wetland, or a part of it during the Iron Age. Both these seem to have had ceremonial and religious roles.

As noted earlier, both the monumental hall and its fifth century replacement have revealed a variety of prestigious finds, many of which seem to have had a cultic origin. The first hall contained Roman hack silver, bronze and glass objects, gold-ornamented silver neck-rings, silver figurines, and over 50 *denarii*. One of the post-holes of the younger longhouse also contained a small gold hoard and a face (or mask) made of silver.

The low-lying area close to the secondary cult-building meanwhile contained an interesting concentration of pits and culture layers made up of unusual, valuable objects that were deposited over a span of the third to sixth centuries, the main period of time in which the elite complex was in use. Of the variety of objects found, many are of gold and silver, including jewelry and parts of jewelry. According to Jørgensen, the finds are unlikely to represent lost objects and appear to have been deposited deliberately at this location. He proposes two primary explanations for the finds: the first, he says, is that the finds represent primary depositions of valuables at the spot. The second is that they are the result of a secondary deposition in which the remains of meals and objects from rituals held in the nearby buildings themselves were then brought to the location for deposition (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 333). These explanations can of course be extended to all of the ritual finds described in this thesis.

The secondary cult-building located at Gudme is clearly associated with both the nearby hall, as well as the culture layers and valuables found at the edge of the nearby wetland. As noted above, it remained standing throughout the period that the complex was in use, until both itself and the hall were torn down and abandoned in the sixth century. As noted above, the

¹²⁰ As with the two general overviews of Gudme previously, unless otherwise noted, this overview follows the more detailed overviews given in Jørgensen, 2009, pp. 332-334; 2010, pp. 273-277; and 2011, pp. 77-89.

valuables that were deliberately deposited were less than 50 meters away from the building, which itself has no utility or craft function. As with the other cult-houses described in this section, the indication is that it was used in a ritual context and was under the control of the elite milieu that lived in the longhouse on the same yard. That we have found so many wealthy depositions at both longhouses as well as the cult-house also indicates that the main dwellings of the elites were also used ceremonially themselves. This adds further weight to the idea stated earlier that the political and religious roles of the elite were strongly interrelated. The longhouse, the cult-house, and the yard itself, particularly the low-lying edge of the marshland, seem to have all formed part of a complex that was controlled and used by the elite at Gudme.

5.4.3 Evidence for Ritual Activity at Tissø

The same is evident at Tissø. As described above, the central place at Tissø had a number of features which appear to have had a religious purpose for the elite milieu operating out of it. From the evidence of weapon depositions in the lake itself, the cult-house within an enclosure, the probable votive offerings of metal objects and animals, a variety of ritual activities clearly took place in and around the elite residence, as was also the case in Gudme and Uppåkra. Before over-viewing this ritual activity, however, it is important to discuss one different but highly interesting aspect of the site.

The name “Tissø” has traditionally been interpreted to mean “Týr’s Lake”, with the understanding that “Týr” is the obscure deity most famous from Snorri Sturluson’s account in *Snorra-Edda*, in which he is said to have sacrificed his hand to bind the cosmic wolf, Fenrir (see, for example, *Gylfaginning*, p. 29). The word *týr*, however, does not necessarily refer to that specific deity, and appears often throughout Eddic and skaldic poetry as a common noun, meaning simply “god” or, in the plural form as *tívar*, meaning “gods” (see, for example, *Völuspá*, st. 63). In the case of Tissø, it could very well originally refer to this common noun *týr*, in which case the name of the lake would have meant something more like “the lake belonging to [a] god”. Likewise, since the word *týr* could become a title for any specific god, even in the corpus of Eddic poetry (see, for example, *Völuspá*, st. 52), it is quite possible that during the period of time in which Tissø was the site of a residential complex belonging to a heathen aristocracy, the word could have been the moniker of any number of specific deities which are no longer familiar to us. Finally, and most importantly, it is worth bearing in mind that between the sixth and eleventh centuries, even if Tissø’s name did, by some chance, refer

to the deity we recognize as Týr, it could be an older place name coined by a different group of people and thus irrelevant to the ritual beliefs and practices of the ruler who established the elite residence, just as the place name, along with many other place names with heathen name-elements, obviously did not reflect the beliefs of the Christian rulers of Denmark when it continued to be used after the conversion.

In short, while the name “Tissø”, like that of Gudme and Helgö, is clearly theophoric, indicating that the landscape had some religious significance that was great enough for the name to become permanent, it does not necessarily mean that we should automatically assume that the cult belonging to the ruler who operated out of the complex at Tissø was dedicated to the god Týr, or even that the god had anything specifically to do the religious rituals we find there. In fact, considering that the site at Tissø was not a permanent residence and that it was established fairly late (compared to Gudme and Helgö, for example), it is probably very unlikely that the ruler who operated out of Tissø (and who probably resided at Lejre) was responsible for the original name of Tissø.

Whatever the case, it is clear that from as early as early as the sixth century, in other words around the time that the first large-scale activity began to take place at the first elite complex at Tissø, depositions were already taking place at the lake itself. The depositions included tools, dress ornaments, and especially swords, axes, and lances and a total of some 50 objects to by 2008 (Jørgensen, 2008, p. 77). This indicates that the lake already had a sort of sacral importance to the people of the region before any elite aristocracy began to establish a complex on its western shore. One might theorize that these votive offerings reflect something in which the elite milieu starting off by emulating local votive traditions at the time that they began building the first monumental hall. It is evident that these ritual depositions continued throughout the Viking Age, until the elite residence at Tissø was abandoned in the eleventh century.

As stated previously, the first of the manors at Tissø took the shape of two longhouses, both of which were probably double-storeyed and monumental, at least one of the two being a hall.¹²¹ Between the two longhouses stood a third building with a connected palisade. No utility use has been identified with the building, and based on similar structures at the other sites under discussion, it is possible it too served a cultic function. As noted earlier, this entire complex, including the cult-house, was burned down in the seventh century, and a new complex was built

¹²¹ As in the previous section, unless otherwise stated, the overview here of the first complex at Tissø follows that of Josafine Franck Bican, 2010. The second complex follows that given in Lars Jørgensen, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009, and 2010.

over 500 meters to the south. This second complex provides enough material to give us a particularly clear picture of the kind of ritual activity that took place at Tissø.

As has also been stated in the previous section, it is obvious from the large concentration of specialized objects found in the buildings from this second site, such as Frankish drinking glass and parts of swords, that the large hall was the site of a variety of rituals which were at least political in nature, even if not overtly religious. However, as has been noted, right outside the main hall was a special enclosure which, according to Jørgensen, clearly had a cultic function (see Jørgensen, 2003; and 2009). This enclosure was built around the same time as the hall, in the middle of the seventh century, and contained the smaller cult-building which, as stated in previously, can be traced as having stood throughout the four phases of the second hall building (see figure 3). While the enclosed area went through a number of changes after it was constructed, but remained more or less intact for most of those phases. For much of that time, from the period it was constructed until at some point in the ninth century, the fenced-off area was physically attached to the great hall, with one of the doorways of the hall leading directly into the enclosure itself. At some point in the ninth century, the fenced-off area was rebuilt so that it was detached from the main hall, but it still contained a specialized cult-house. During the late tenth century, the fence and the cult-house were removed and a larger building of unknown use was built just outside of the old specialized area. It is possible this was a cult-house as well.

Within the enclosed area of the cult-house, phosphate analysis has shown a high concentration of bone material, though it has been subsequently ploughed-up, eliminating any chance for detailed analysis. The area around the cult-house and the hall have also revealed a number of unusual pendants which may represent mythological concepts (see figure 3). Jørgensen has argued that some of the pendants represent *valkyrjur*, or possibly even Freyja (Jørgensen, 2003, p. 197), but there is no good reason to make an identification beyond the fact that some of them depict female figures with unique, or prestigious qualities.

Outside the cult-house itself, and starting at the south-eastern corner of the enclosed area with the cult-house, a row of 34 pits extends about 80 meters southwards. These pits have a layer of charcoal at the bottom and, according to Jørgensen, were systematically planned, being laid at the same time and with even measurements, but they are otherwise featureless (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 339). They must have been associated with the enclosure of the cult-house in some way, perhaps used in interconnected rituals, but it is impossible to say for certain. As stated previously, similar pits have been found at Toftegård.

Additionally, two pit-houses have been found at either end of the enclosure of the cult-house at Tissø, one of which is situated directly next to the row of pits. Neither pit-house shows any sign of having been used for any normal utility purpose, unlike other pit-houses which often contain scrap remains, indicating that material was worked at the location (for example, as in a forge). These pit-houses thus seem to have had another function. Indeed, a jaw bone belonging to a seven-year-old child was discovered in one of them. A third pit-house sheltering a forge was then positioned along the north-western corner of the elite complex. Just east of the forge is another area with thick culture layers containing animal bones, charcoal, new strike-a-lights, sickles and other tools which all appear to have been deliberately deposited rather than lost and probably reflect depositions relating to a ritual feast and ceremony. Finally, about 20 meters north of the hall, was a large pile of stones that showed no sign of charcoal, soot or finds. These are similar to other stone piles, albeit fire-cracked, which have been found at Lejre and at Järrestad. As with those places, the stone piles may have played a role in ritual considering their position in the landscape and apparent lack of utility.

One final feature may be added to the catalogue of cult-activity at Tissø. An area with thick layers of bone, burnt stones, hack silver, Carolingian coins and jewelry, and even a Norse coin from 825 with an inscription saying “Haithabu” have been found on top of a hill at the highest point of the area, just west of the elite complex and the accompanying marketplace. No structures have been found at this hilltop, and it has been interpreted as an open-air sacrificial site that must certainly have been connected to the nearby complex (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 343).

On the whole, despite the variety of features around the hall at Tissø which have apparent ritual functions, the actual number of finds associated with them are relatively few. This is particularly true when we compare Tissø to some of the other places covered in this thesis, such as the remarkable cult-house at Uppåkra or the wealth of gold finds at Gudme. This, of course, might well be explained by the apparent fact that Tissø was a secondary residence, only used occasionally.

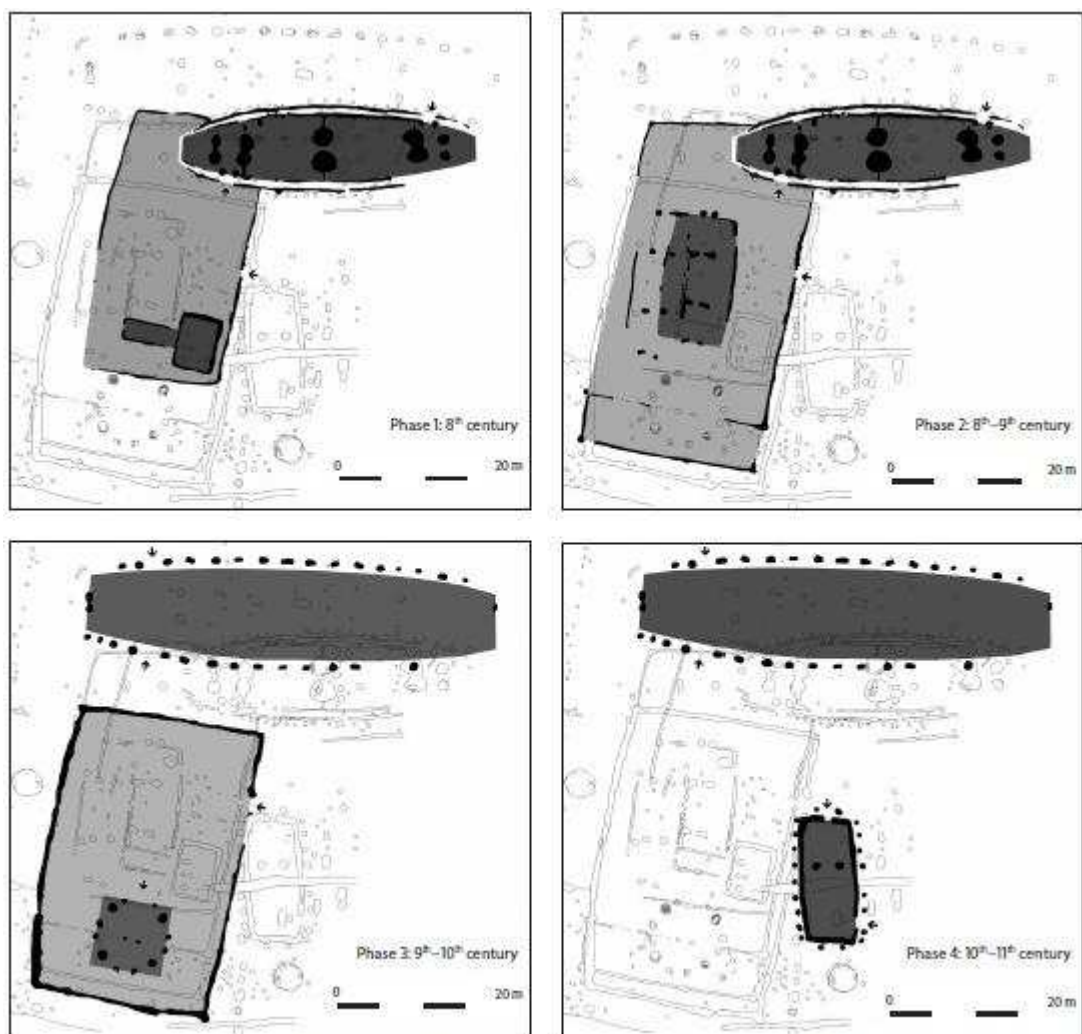


Figure 3. Four phases of the hall and cult-house at the second complex at Tissø (from Jørgensen, 2009, p. 342).

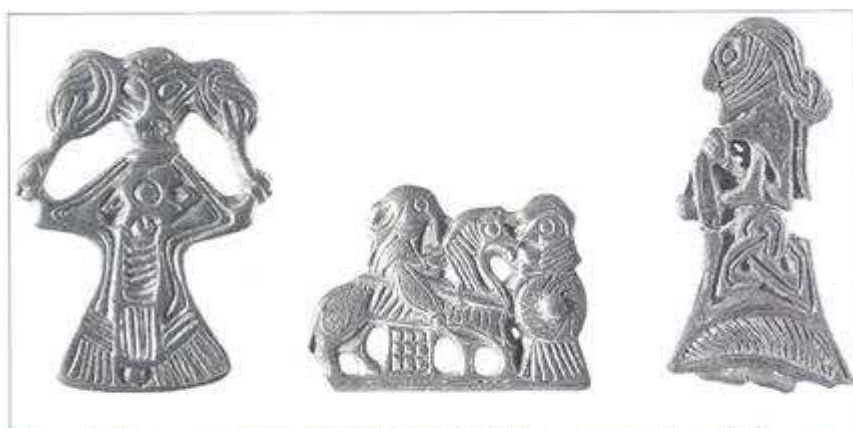


Figure 4. Some pendants from the hall/cult-house complex at Tissø (from Jørgensen, 2003, p. 197).

5.4.4 Evidence for Ritual Activity at Lejre

As noted above, much of the features at Lejre are already familiar to us from places such as Tissø, Uppåkra, and Gudme. As will be described below, the settlement features supposed cult-houses accompanying its longhouses and at least three huge burial mounds stood at Lejre, similar to the situation at Uppåkra.¹²²

Lejre's cult-related features include the remains of up to five stone ship monuments which have been found at the site, which are situated as part of a graveyard. One of the stone ship settings is beside a monumental burial mound named Grydehøj, dating to shortly after 600. During excavations in the 1950s, it was shown that the mound contained a large amount of animal bones, as well as gold thread and bronze. The indication is that the burial ceremony, which was clearly for a member of the elite milieu at Lejre, involved animal sacrifice and the deposition of grave gifts for the departed (Christensen, 1993, p. 166).

As previously stated, beside the hall at the center of the first complex at Lejre stood a smaller cult-house. About 20 meters from both the cult-house and the hall was a heap of fire-cracked stones, about 16 meters in diameter and 0.75 meters high. Around this stone-pile, large quantities of bones and charcoal were found packed into pits, along with pieces of gold wire and foil, and glass from jewelry and drinking glasses (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 344).

As stated in Chapter 5.3.4, the longhouse was constructed almost adjacently to a large mound. The mound in question has been dated to the Bronze Age, and so was ancient well before the elite residence at Lejre was established (Jørgensen, 2009, p. 344). Choosing to build a hall at the foot of the ancient barrow-mound must have been a conscious decision on behalf of the ruler overseeing the construction. It is not unreasonable to suggest that he must certainly have been attempting to incorporate the mound into a narrative of legitimacy for his rulership. As noted above, the origins of the mound, and who it originally belonged to, certainly would have been legendary by the time the elite residence at Lejre was constructed.

As with the first residency at Fredshøj, the second complex at Mysselhøjgård also centered around a hall, which was even larger than its predecessor, and constructed on an elevated terrace overlooking the settlement. This has since been named the Lejre Hall (see Chapter 5.3.4). Once again, as we have seen at the earlier elite complex at Fredshøj, as well as at Tissø, Gudme and Uppåkra, another cult-house stood near the hall at Mysselhøjgård, and a

¹²² As with the general overview of Lejre given above, the overview of ritual activity given here is essentially based on the research by Tom Christensen, primarily that given in his 2015 publication and supplemented with his articles from 1993, and 2008. All other references are cited directly.

heap of burnt stone about 35 meters in diameter lay nearby, underscoring the importance of all three elements (hall, cult-house, and ritual) functioning together as part of the activities overseen by the ruler of Lejre. Interestingly enough, the cult-house seems to have been shut down at the same time as the Lejre Hall, in the early tenth century (Christensen, 2008, pp. 121-125).

5.4.5 Evidence for Ritual Activity at Järrestad

As stated in Chapter 5.3.6, Järrestad exhibits many similar features to those sites noted above and especially a close connection to the rulers at Lejre/Tissø. From about 700 until 1050, it was the site of an elite complex featuring a large hall and an accompanying palisade with another enclosed specialized building. The single building, another probable cult-house appears to have stood throughout the period of time in which various halls were active. Not much can be said about the building, save that it consisted of four pairs of roof-supporting pillars and was over 20 meters long,¹²³ and that a smithing-hammer and a socketed axe were found deposited in one of the post-holes of the building. The cultic role is largely surmised on the basis of parallels at the other sites in which, as we have seen at Uppåkra, Uppsala, Tissø, Gudme, and Toftegård, objects are ritually deposited in post-holes.

All the same, about 30 meters east of the hall, where the landscape appears to have become marshland, a heap of fire-cracked stones about 60 meters in diameter was found. While no finds were discovered in the layer of stones. Nonetheless, near the stones, seven man-made wells were dug, all of which date to between the ninth and tenth centuries. They were constructed of timber, sandstone slabs, and wattle. It is of particular interest that a significant quantity of animal bones was found in these wells, including a high percentage of horse skulls (Jørgensen 2009, p. 346). These remains have been interpreted as animal sacrifices.

¹²³ Apparently, the building's exact dimensions are hard to tell for certain. This may be due to the fact that, as Söderberg says, there are no signs left of where the walls might have been. The measurement given that is based on the post-holes (see Söderberg, 2002, p. 291).

5.4.6 The Emerging Warrior Aristocracy of Southern Scandinavia: Conclusion

A reoccurring theme throughout this chapter has been the idea that centers of power in southern Scandinavia in the Roman and Germanic Iron Ages were increasingly centered around elite settlements that were dominated first and foremost by monumental halls which, in many cases such as at Uppåkra and Uppsala, were placed at the highest point of the settlement and could be seen from far and wide. The halls are consistently accompanied by a number of other features that are of a decidedly ritual nature. We should bear in mind that the halls, the cult-houses and their enclosures, the pit-houses and the locations where votive offerings were given would not have been isolated. They were more likely part of a network of local sites within complexes that utilized various aspects of the landscape in a ritual context. To give just one example, we can imagine that at Tissø rituals might have involved the long row of fire-pits, the enclosure with the cult-house, the hall itself, and the lake, as part of a sequence of interconnected ritual actions similarly. At Uppåkra it has been suggested that the large depositions of weapons might have originally been stored in the cult-house itself (Larsson & Lenntorp, 2002, p. 42). Perhaps processions led the weapons out of the building to the site where they were ritually destroyed and deposited as part of a greater event that involved ritual drinking and feasting on animals that had been sacrificed at another nearby site. It should also be noted that deposition of an object is only the final part of any ritual which may have included any number of rituals in which magnificent dramatic actions, including speeches, acting, processions, even ritual combats might have taken place, activities which left no objects as a record.¹²⁴ The immediate landscape of the hall can be described as an example of what Stefan Brink calls “sacral landscape” in which the hall and cult-houses were just the center (Brink, 1997, p. 431).

Bearing this in mind, it is interesting to note that within the landscapes of these elite residences, so many features that are associated with rituals are man-made, the rituals taking place in the monumental hall, in a structure on the yard of the hall, or in the nearby “high-timbered”¹²⁵ cult-houses themselves, which could have been elaborately carved like the later stave-churches, and could have held the idols of gods or other sacred objects. This, as noted in Chapter 2.2, represents quite a change from the earlier ritual activities which seem to have taken place in natural sites on the periphery of settlements. During the Late Roman, and Germanic

¹²⁴ See Gunnell, 1995 for a full discussion of ritual drama in heathen Scandinavia.

¹²⁵ “Hittoz æsir/ á Iðavelli/ þeir er hǫrg og hof/ hátimbroðo” (*Völuspá*, st. 7; see also *Grimnismál*, st. 16).

Iron Age into the Viking Age, these sites clearly represent the new political, economic, and military power-centers that were evolving in southern Scandinavia, sites that belonged to the new warrior kings that were coming to power during this period. As this chapter suggests, it is also evident from these sites that during the period in question, the religious and cultic activity of the area was becoming increasingly centralized around the residency of the aristocratic milieu itself.

As was also stated in Chapter 2.2.4, it has been argued by various scholars that as a consequence of warrior-rulers incorporating religion into their ideology of power, religion in southern Scandinavia during the Migration and Vendel eras clearly began to shift from something that was more communal, decentralized, and located in natural places towards something that was increasingly centralized around the warrior ruler himself, and his hall. As Herschend has observed, that the new focus on the hall reflected a shift in society towards that of a hierarchy headed by an individual, rather than one led by a council or *þing* of freemen (Herschend, 1998, p. 11). The hall, and the associated cult-house were a means by which the ruler could gather and maintain support, creating a new kind of elite, pseudo-family around himself, making use of various kinds of political and religious performances to do so, as argued by Enright and Nordberg in Chapter 4.2, and exemplifying Sundqvist's concept of "religious ruler ideology" in Chapter 3.2.3. Models for this kind of rulership naturally came from places like Rome and the Frankish Merovingians with which (as this chapter has shown) the new Nordic rulers had obvious trade and personal contact over the course of centuries.

Chapter 4 demonstrated the long history of historians who have connected Óðinn with the aristocracy of Viking Age Scandinavia. Now that an archaeological framework has been given which has demonstrated the development of an aristocracy which seems to have adopted a new form of religion around themselves, the next natural objective is examine whether there is any evidence for Óðinn-worship in this particular milieu that might reflect this change being associated with this god, and, if so, to try and fit it within the framework thus far provided.

Chapter 6

The Evidence for Óðinn-Worship

6.1. Introduction and Methodology

This chapter will examine the evidence for the conceptual existence of a deity that can be definitively identified as Óðinn, focusing on material and written evidence from the period and in the regions in which a milieu of warrior aristocrats was developing in Scandinavia (see Chapter 5). As in previous chapters, the aim here will be to concentrate where possible on solid evidence, and to attempt to place it in a realistic context. Some evidence is naturally comparatively straight-forward, as in the case of a runic inscription with Óðinn's name on it. Other evidence, such as textual references composed by Christian writers during or close to the period in question, even if they refer to the god, need some discussion, because they form part of a narrative produced by a milieu of people other than that which is at present under investigation, and as such, are potentially misleading. The same applies to place-names, which while they can only be confirmed by later maps or other kinds of written records, have been shown to have probable roots in much earlier times. Yet other kinds of material (such as apparent Óðinnic images on archaeological items) are more a matter of conjecture, but will also be considered. The ultimate objective, is nonetheless to produce a solid framework of evidence for the existence (and worship) of Óðinn during the period in question which can be applied to our understanding of the development of the new warrior aristocracy in southern Scandinavia.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the following chapter will be as follows: The chapter will be broken into three parts, with each representing a different type of evidence for the conceptual existence of the worship of Óðinn during the period in question. In all likelihood, each part will provide a different kind of insight with regard to the nature of Óðinn-worship in Iron-Age Scandinavia. Combined, they should work together to provide a more complete overview of the provenance and nature of Óðinn-worship as it developed within the emerging elite milieu.

Chapter 6 will assemble and assess the earliest quantifiable and datable proof for the existence of Óðinn as a named entity in southern Scandinavia (or the Nordic diaspora, including

Anglo-Saxon England), in other words, evidence for a cult of Óðinn having existed in these parts. In short, the focus will be on those references made to any Germanic cognate of Óðinn, including both written works by contemporary Christian writers, and inscriptions. References to any name which happens to be one of Óðinn's considerable number of by-names will be disregarded: these names are given in works (like the *Eddukvæði* and Snorri's *Prose Edda*) recorded in thirteenth century Iceland (see Chapter 1), and include a range of by-names that we cannot be certain Óðinn always had. Early references to Mercury/Mercurius¹²⁶ are similarly uncertain evidence for Óðinn-worship, and will also be disregarded, essentially because there is evidence to believe that the conception of Óðinn as a Germanic equivalent for Mercury (seen in the work of Jonas of Bobbio, Paulus Diaconus and Ælfic in the seventh, eighth and tenth centuries: See below) was something that was developed within learned Christian circles. It initially reflects *interpretatio romana* whereby Germanic gods were translated in Roman terms, the actual claim that it was Óðinn who equated Mercury only being made centuries later by Christians. One cannot be sure whether this actually was the case in the Roman Iron Age. This will be elaborated on more throughout Chapter 6.1.

Chapter 6.2 will examine the place-name evidence. As noted above, place-names are difficult to use as evidence, let alone as "proof" of a heathen cult, and they are even more difficult to date. However, they can be useful since they provide general observations about the regions in which a deity may have enjoyed a cult (and sometimes the nature of such a cult). In short, the distribution of place-names which can be ascribed with reasonable certainty to Óðinn, and the analysis of those areas which have a higher concentration of such names than elsewhere, can provide a spacial-framework which allows us to conclude where Óðinn-worship might have been most prominent (and where it was not known). The evidence presented in Chapters 6.1 and 6.2 together should therefore allow us to draw reasonable conclusions about both when, and where Óðinn's cult came to prominence. Wherever possible, both subchapters will also highlight any reasonably direct connection that might exist between the data provided and kingship or aristocracy.

Chapter 6.3 will contain an overview of the archaeological iconography which can potentially be correlated with the figure of Óðinn. Naturally, this section will be largely speculative, since it is impossible to confirm who or what any given image was originally intended to portray. However, if treated carefully, some reasonable conclusions can be made about the iconography that can be related to Óðinn. While Chapters 6.1 and 6.2 will focus on

¹²⁶ See, for example, Tacitus, 1970, pp. 108-109.

the spacial and temporal evidence for Óðinn, and how this relates to the development of a new powerful milieu of warrior aristocrats, it might be said that Chapter 6.3 involves an attempt to see whether if Óðinn, or rather the characteristics of an “Óðinnic nature” can also reasonably be identified directly within that milieu, also noting which aspects of this nature seem to be stressed in the iconography.

6.1.1 Uþin, Wodan, and Godan: The Earliest Dateable References to Óðinn

The oldest extant piece of evidence for the existence of Óðinn (as of now) in the Germanic and Nordic world is a runic inscription that had been carved onto the back of a brooch, found in Nordendorf, in southern Germany. Macleod and Mees date the inscription to the end of the sixth century (Macleod & Mees, 2006, pp. 17-18). Other researchers have dated it to the first half of the seventh century (Simek, 2007, pp. 235-236; and Krause, 1966, p. 294;). The inscription apparently reads “*Logapore Wodan Wigiþonar awaleubwinix*” (Shaw, 2002, p. 106; see figure 5). The identity of the figure *Logapore* is disputed, but certainly *Wigiþonar* refers to Þórr, although it is uncertain if “*wigi*” in this case refers to his role in battle or as a consecrator (see Simek, 2007, pp. 235-236). *Wodan* here is clearly a cognate of Óðinn. While the context and meaning of the runic inscription is unclear, it is essentially irrelevant here. The main point is that this allows us to establish with certainty that Wodan/Óðinn was conceptually extant among the Germanic people in the sixth century, even though it is impossible to say much about what that conception included.

Early cognates for Óðinn also appear in three textual sources, all dating to the seventh century (Shaw, 2002, p. 106), and which do require some contextual discussion. The *Vita Sancti Columbani*, written by Jonas of Bobbio, retelling the life of the Irish saint, Columbanus, contains the oldest description of a ritual which can be conclusively connected to the worship of Óðinn.¹²⁷¹²⁸ The accuracy of the account is, of course, dubious, since it is not a first-hand

¹²⁷ According to Ian Wood, Jonas of Bobbio wrote his account sometime between 639 and 643 (Wood, 1982, p. 63).

O’Hara agrees, observing about the oldest manuscripts date to the ninth century: “Although to our knowledge no manuscript of Jonas of Bobbio’s *Vita Columbani abbatibus et discipulorumque eius* survives from the seventh and eighth centuries we can, nevertheless, to some degree trace its influence and dissemination from a number of other works which were written in Merovingian Gaul during this period (the seventh century)” O’Hara, 2009, p. 126. Philip Shaw also gives a seventh century dating. See Shaw, 2002, pp. 105-127.

¹²⁸ As stated below, while the manuscripts of the *Vita Columbani*, as well as *Fredgar’s Chronical*, and the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum* (described in the main text) date to the ninth and tenth centuries, these accounts themselves are still dated to the seventh century. For that reason, they are being used in this study, while other accounts such as the *Second Merseburg Charm* (tenth century), descriptions of Óðinn given by Ælfric of Eynsham (955-1010) and the *Nine Herbs Charm* (tenth century) are being omitted. While they certainly are

account, and, more importantly, because it seems evident that the author clearly had no qualms about fabricating at least some of the elements of the ritual to meet his own narrative objectives. It tells of a visit by Columbanus to the Suebians in Germany:

[...] For there are Suebic tribes in that locality. While he stays there and goes about among the inhabitants of that place, he finds that they want to perform a profane sacrifice, and a large vessel - which is called a cup in the vernacular and contained around twenty modia [a modium is an ancient corn measure; the fluid capacity of this vessel is substantial] was placed in the middle, full of beer. At which the man of God went up and asked what they might want to be done about that. They say that they want to sacrifice to their god, called Wodan, whom, as others say, they call Mercurius. He, hearing this appalling design, blew on the vessel, and, in a wondrous manner, the vessel broke up and was split irrecoverably, and the force in the flowing liquid of the beer broke through it; and he was clearly given to understand that a devil had been hidden in that vessel, who, by means of the profane liquid, would steal the souls of those sacrificing (Shaw, 2002, pp. 118-119; original Latin in Krusch (Ed.), 1902, p. 101.).

As noted above, while the story (which has obvious parallels to other hagiography Christian conversion accounts such as that of the destruction of the “Oak of Jupiter” by Willibald)¹²⁹ is at least partially fabricated, there are three elements to it (in addition to its dating) which are of some interest to this thesis. Firstly, we have the description of “Wodan” being associated with a ritual involving alcohol has some intriguing parallels with both the archaeological remains of drinking vessels found at the elite residencies throughout southern Scandinavia (see Chapter 5). Next, we have the echoes of the prevalent theme of Óðinn’s association with alcohol noted in the later mythological literature preserved in Iceland, both through his connection to the cosmic mead, *Óðrerir*, and also in a more general sense.¹³⁰ Lastly, we have the connection with the Suebians, which, wherever it originally comes from, is

evidence for heathen worship of Óðinn, the earlier sources given here should be sufficient to prove the existence of his worship without relying on late sources within the parameters of this thesis. With regard to *the Second Merseburg Charm*, this is a high German magical charm relaying a short story about “Uodan” using magic to heal the injured horse of “Balder”. The *Nine Herbs Charm* is a long, semi-pagan charm intended to heal poison or infection by using nine herbs, and it refers to “Woden” as obtaining these nine herbs. Ælfric, writing in the tenth century, associates Óðinn with Mercury “hwilon on mercuries. Þe men hatað Oþon” and demonizes him. For the text of the *Merseburg Charm*, see Bruane (Ed.), 1875, p. 83; for the dating of the *Merseburg Charm*, see Bostock, 1955, p. 16; for the text and dating of the *Nine Herbs Charm*, see Grattan & Singer, 1952, pp. 152-54; for Ælfric’s above quote, see Ælfric, 1966, p. 264; for further descriptions of Óðinn, see Ælfric, 1968, p. 684; see North, p. 81 for a commentary on Ælfric.

¹²⁹ Willibald, Robinson (Trans.), 1916, pp. 62-64.

¹³⁰ See, for example, *Grímnismál*, st. 19: “Gera ok Freka/ seðr gunntamiðr/ hróðig Herjaððr/ en við vín eitt/ vopngöfigr/ Óðinn æ lifir”

consistent with the remaining literary sources from the seventh century, and will be explained below.

The two remaining references to Óðinn which are dated to the seventh century, *Fredegar's Chronicle*,¹³¹ and the *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*,¹³² both tell of the ethnogenesis of a Germanic tribe called the Langobards (mentioned in Chapter 5.2.1 and described in further detail below). According to Philip Shaw, both accounts were later used in a retelling of the ethnogenesis by Paulus Diaconus in the eighth century in his *Historia Langobardorum* (bk 1, ch. 8).¹³³ Evidently he was also aware of the *Vita Columbani* (Shaw, pp. 73, 106). It is unnecessary to repeat the ethnogenesis as it appears in all three accounts, so the version by Paulus Diaconus is presented below:

At this point, the men of old tell a silly story that the Wandals coming to Godan (Wotan) besought him for victory over the Winnili and that he answered that he would give the victory to those whom he saw first at sunrise; that then Gambara went to Frea (Freja) wife of Godan and asked for victory for the Winnili, and that Frea gave her counsel that the women of the Winnili should take down their hair and arrange it upon the face like a beard, and that in the early morning they should be present with their husbands and in like manner station themselves to be seen by Godan from the quarter in which he had been wont to look through his window toward the east. And so it was done. And when Godan saw them at sunrise he said: "Who are these long-beards?" And then Frea induced him to give the victory to those to whom he had given the name. And thus Godan gave the victory to the Winnili (Paulus Diaconus, 1907, p. 6; for the original, see Paulus Diaconus, 1878, p. 52).

It is interesting to note that here Godan (who as Paulus notes elsewhere was also called Wodan) is associated with the Nordic Langobards as well as the Alamanni, both of whom came from Scandinavia, according to Paulus (Paulus Diaconus, 1907, p. 7). As Shaw suggests, by the seventh century, the Alamanni were otherwise known as the Suebi, and the Langobards were identified in the first century by Strabo as one of the Suebic tribes¹³⁴ (Shaw, 2002, 116). In this context, it is worth noting that the original location of the Nordendorf brooch in an Alamannic row cemetery in southern Germany (Shaw, 2007, p. 399) makes it possible that at some point

¹³¹ Fredegar, 1888, p. 110.

¹³² Paulus Diaconus, 1878, p. 52.

¹³³ As with the previous written accounts, while the accounts of Paulus Diaconus are dated to the eighth century, the oldest extant manuscripts date to the tenth century. The *Origo gentis Langobardorum* is extant in three manuscripts. Two of these date to the tenth century, and one dates to the eleventh (Paulus Diaconus, 1878, p. 1).

¹³⁴ Strabo, 1917-1932, pp. 111, 156; On the Suebi, see also Tacitus, 1977, *Germania*, pp. 38-46.

an Alamannic individual owned it. In short, the earliest references we have for Óðinn are ascribed to the Suebians/Alamanni.

The earliest verifiable evidence for Óðinn in Scandinavia proper is a runic text inscribed onto a fragment of human skull, found at Ribe in southern Jutland in Denmark (Macleod and Mees, 2006, p. 25). The inscription is dated to around 725, and appears on the concave, “inner” part of the skull which was not taken from a recently deceased individual, as the bone appears to have been exposed to the elements for some time before the inscription was carved into it. The fragment also has two holes which seem to have been bored into it prior to the runes being carved, through which something could have been threaded, allowing the fragment to serve as an amulet. While the inscription is not well understood, the version that follows is more or less the most accepted form¹³⁵

Ulfr auk Upin auk Hutiur

Hialbburis uiþr

Þaimauiarkiauktuir kunig buur (Moltke, 1985, p. 151; see figure 6).

(Wolf and Óðinn and High-Týr

Is help for Bur against these:

Pain and Dwarf-stroke

- Carved by Bur.)
- (Translation based on that given in Macleod and Mees, 2006, p. 25).

Regardless of the exact reading of the inscription as a whole, it is generally accepted the runes can be interpreted as meaning that a man (named Bur) carved the inscription, asking for aid against pain and “Dwarf-stroke” (probably meaning a shooting pain, perhaps similar to “elf-shot”¹³⁶) from three entities, “Wolf, Óðinn, and High-Týr”.¹³⁷

Of course, while the possibility remains that the bone fragment has been brought here from elsewhere (Ribe being a market centre from an early point), the implication is that here

¹³⁵ See more details on the translation discussion in the following; Macleod & Mees, 2006, pp. 25-27; Moltke, 1985, pp. 151-153; and Shaw, 2002, pp. 124-129.

¹³⁶ Elf-shot is described in great detail in Hall, 2007, pp 96-107.

¹³⁷ As already noted in Chapter 5, *týr* need not refer to the Eddic Týr. In fact, if we treat the term as an informal noun (“*týr*/god”), then we see an interesting parallel with the oath recorded in multiple Icelandic literary sources where it is recorded that the oath also invoked three gods: “Hjálpi mér svá nú Freyr ok Njörðr ok hinn almatki ás” In this context “*hutiur*” and “hinn almatki ás” would mean essentially the same thing. (*Landnámabok*, 1968, p. 35; *Þorsteins þátrr uxafóts*, in *Harðar saga*, 2009, p. 342; and *Brot af Þórðar sögu hreðu*, 2007, p. 232).

we have firm evidence that not only was Óðinn known in Denmark in the early eighth century, but also that (as in the Merseburg inscription, see footnote above) he was seen as having magical medicinal powers.

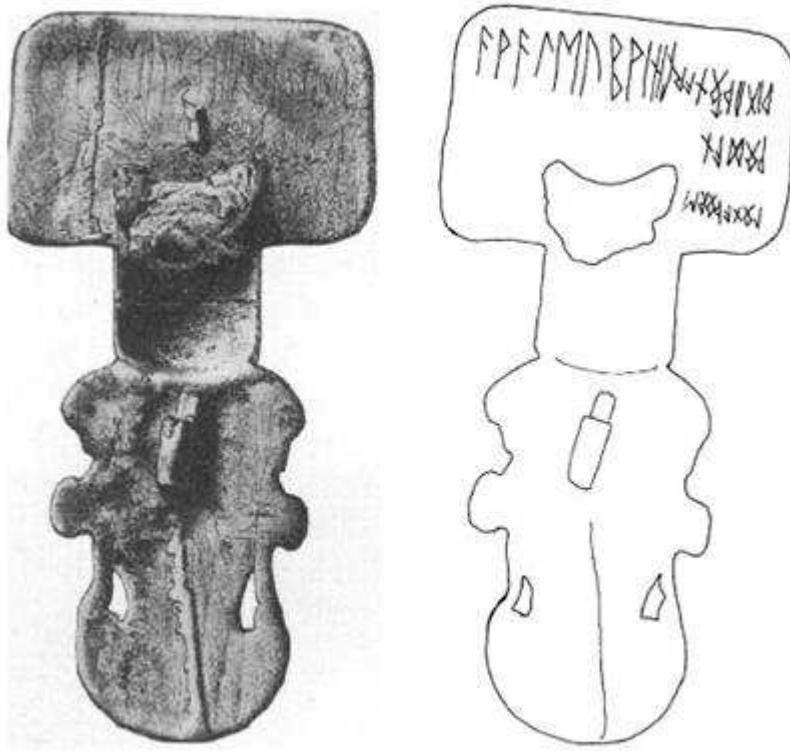


Figure 5. Nordendorf brooch inscription (left image from Arild Hauges Runer, [07-05-2017]; right image from Shaw, 2002, p. 107).

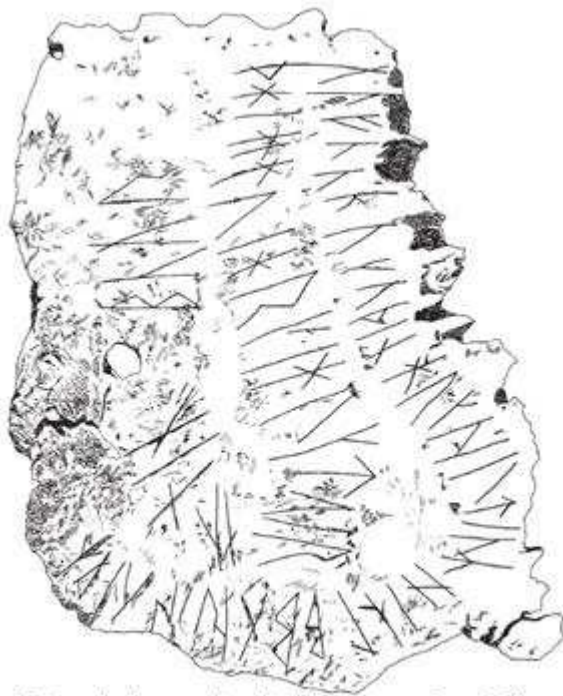


Figure 6. Inscription on the skull fragment from Ribe (MacLeod & Mees, 2006, p. 26).

6.1.2 More Problematic Evidence for Óðinn in Anglo-Saxon Christian Works

The examples given thus far of reference to the name of Óðinn in the Germanic and Nordic worlds are perhaps the most obvious early references to Óðinn, and with regard to the questions this thesis is dealing with, need little explanation. The next examples are more problematic as a result of the context in which they appear, and need more discussion with regard to their trustworthiness.

The first time Óðinn appears in Anglo-Saxon writings is in Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written between 700 and 731 (Bede, 1988, p. 242). Keeping strictly to the methodology outlined at the beginning of this chapter, this confirms that the god was known in Christian circles in England by the eighth century, and suggests that the idea was older, perhaps dating back to the seventh century (and the Anglo-Saxon oral tradition). Of particular interest here, (considering this potential link to oral tradition) is that Bede's account is the first piece of evidence that directly connects Óðinn to kingship. It is thus worth more discussion.

According to Bede (bk 1, ch. 15, Óðinn was the progenitor of the royal family of Kent:

The two first commanders are said to have been Hengist and Horsa. Of whom Horsa, being afterwards slain in battle by the Britons, was buried in the eastern parts of Kent, where a monument, bearing his name, is still in existence. They were the sons of Victgilsus, whose father was Vecta, son of Woden; from whose stock the royal race of many provinces deduce their original (Bede, 1969, p. 23).

It is perhaps ironic that in this first account in which Óðinn is firmly connected to kingship, the text is already taking on a Christianized, euhemeristic form. It seems clear from this account that Bede (like Snorri and Saxo in later times) wished to portray Óðinn as a man instead of as a living deity, even though at this time, the evidence given above gives us reason to be relatively certain that Óðinn was regarded by many as a god in southern Scandinavia. It is admittedly somewhat strange that that Bede's Christian informants seem to have claimed that a heathen god still worshiped in the Nordic countries, was in fact, one of their ancestors from the distant past.

This conundrum has been addressed by various scholars. Eric John, for example, has suggested that Bede did not want to include Óðinn in the genealogy at all, because he knew him to be a heathen deity, but was forced into doing so by some important Kentish nobleman (John,

1992, pp. 127-134). If this was so, it underlines that Óðinn was already well-entrenched into the genealogical background of Anglo-Saxon nobility (with its Nordic and Germanic roots) by Bede's time. This also suggests that the idea had heathen origins from before the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, which points to it having lived for some time in the oral tradition of families. Evidence for the theory that Bede felt uncomfortable about the idea is seen in the fact that at a later point in Bede's work (in bk II, ch V), he recites this same genealogy as that given earlier for Æthelberht of Kent, but leaves now off at Hengest, omitting Óðinn and the two generations before him (John, 1992, p. 129).

John's stance has nonetheless been criticized for two primary reasons (see Shaw, 2002, pp. 97-101): Firstly, as Shaw notes, Bede does not seem to shy away from mentioning heathen gods elsewhere, as when he refers to *Eostre* and *Hretha* in his work, *On the Reckoning of Time*, where he also describes heathen holidays such as *Modranecht* (Bede, 1969, pp. 53). Secondly, it is worth considering that while Bede certainly cuts short Æthelberht's genealogy, he nonetheless refers back to the earlier genealogy which includes Óðinn, thereby making no obvious attempt to deny it.

An alternative, and more likely theory has been given by Shaw. As most people now agree, there is little question that the early royal genealogies (like those given here and in *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*) were not intended to be historically accurate.¹³⁸ They could be, and were changed and restructured regularly, and even put in alliterative meter.¹³⁹ In addition to validating a ruler's right to govern, their purpose was to express political relationships and connections with other royal powers at a given time (Moisl, 1981, pp. 215-248; and Hill, 1982, pp. 41-42; and 1988, pp. 161-174). Turning to Bede's inclusion of Óðinn into the genealogy of Kentish rulers, Shaw says:

It would seem [...] that this genealogy constitutes a constructed response to a desire for origins; regional origins in the case of Vecta, whose presence may reflect Kentish claims on the Isle of

¹³⁸ *Ynglingatal* in *Poetry from the King's Sagas I*, pp. 3-64; *Háleygjatal* in *Poetry from the King's Sagas I*, pp. 195-212.

¹³⁹ Bearing this in mind, it is no coincidence that the names of rulers Hengest/Horsa, Vecta/Voden, or Vitta/Victgils alliterate. Additionally, Thomas Hill has pointed out that in other genealogical lists of this kind, Óðinn tends to be nine generations away from the founder of a dynasty. He points to six unrelated examples and quotes William of Malmesbury as saying "tenth, as they say, from Woden", indicating that this was a known, traditional motif by William of Malmesbury's time (in the twelfth century), well after the period in question. This underlines that while genealogies were clearly manufactured, they do not seem to have always been believed, even if they were presented artfully: see Hill, 1982, 41-42. The original text by William is as follows: "Primos ergo idemque maximus, apud Orientales Anglos rex fuit Redwaldus, a Wodenio (ut scribunt) decimum genu nactus/The first and greatest king, then among the East Angles was Rædwald, who is recorded to have been tenth in descent from Woden" (William of Malmesbury, 1998, pp. 140-143).

Wight (the legendary figure of Vecta seems to have been named after the Isle of Wight, and not vice versa) and wider English origins (Hengest, the first “True Anglo-Saxon”), and continental origins (Woden). Bede’s Woden-Hengest genealogy is essentially an attempt to genealogize several origin myths (Shaw, 2002, p. 101).

Shaw goes on to argue that Óðinn’s role in Bede’s works, as a figure that predated the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons to Britain, was to legitimize the Anglo-Saxons’ place in the pre-histories of the Germanic people on the continent (which naturally includes Scandinavia). In doing so, Bede follows clerical traditions of mythological history in presenting Óðinn as a fully euhemerized man, rather than as a divine being (Shaw, 2002, p. 102), simultaneously allowing him to claim that the Anglo-Saxons were descended from a figure whom heathens still worshiped as a god. As such, the Anglo-Saxon rulers could argue that they had developed further than those kings who still worshipped Óðinn, underlining Christian dominance over heathendom, while emphasizing the place of the English within both Germanic Europe, and the wider Christendom.

Bearing what has been said above in mind, it should be noted that genealogies of this kind relating to Óðinn are not found in mainland Europe. They are only found in Anglo-Saxon England and Norway, where the earliest example is found in *Háleygjatal*, recorded in fragments by Snorri in the thirteenth century but potentially as old as the tenth (see *Ynglinga saga* in Snorri Sturluson, 1941-51, I, pp. 21-22; see also *Haleygjatal* in *Poetry from the King’s Sagas* I, pp. 195-212). In *Háleygjatal*, however, Óðinn is presented in a very different, clearly mythic context. Here the jarls of Hlaðir are portrayed as descended from Skaði, who is herself described as a *jötunn*, sprung from the bones of the earth and a queen of rocks and snow. Neither she or Óðinn, to whom her sons were born are portrayed as human. Both retain their mythic status. In short, while *Háleygjatal* depicts rulers descending from Óðinn, it does not euhemerize him. It seems clear that Bede’s earlier account, on the other hand, was a reinvention of Óðinn as something which was useful within a Christian context, but which was not originally heathen. It is worth comparing both accounts to the earlier-noted Langobard ethnogenesis, which was obviously circulating contemporaneously in learned sources, having been penned during Bede’s lifetime. In the Langobard ethnogenesis, it might be remembered that Óðinn grants their tribe legitimacy from a position of divinity, giving them victory in battle, and granting them a name. He is not described as being a human, and nor is there any statement about the Langobards being physically descended from him. It should also be noted that *Háleygjatal* was penned several centuries after Bede’s death, and even its alleged dating to the tenth century is hundreds

of years after Bede's account. It is interesting to consider if the idea of descent from Óðinn originated within a euhemeristic, Anglo-Saxon Christian context, as we see with Bede, and then was picked up by Scandinavians along the road.

As noted above, while there is some doubt that Bede's account reflects an authentic, old (by his time) tradition whereby English kings were descended from Óðinn, it still serves as a definite link between the god and aristocracy. Moving on from this, one notes that of all the gods the Anglo-Saxon royalty could choose to connect themselves with, they chose Óðinn. As the previous chapters have shown, several powerful seats of rulers had been established in Denmark and southern Sweden in the period just prior to Bede's time, rulers that had personal and political relationships with the Franks and Anglo-Saxons which continued during Bede's lifetime (see Chapter 5). If Óðinn was a god which those kings and their milieu worshipped, and perhaps even identified with beyond all others, then it is not much of a stretch to assume Bede was aware of this, and that in his mind, Óðinn was seen as the god and forefather of all kings among the Germanic people, including the Anglo-Saxons.

This brings us to consideration of another reference to Óðinn in connection to royalty from the period in question. In a letter addressed to Charlemagne, Paulus Diaconus references Óðinn in another context. Speaking of the Danish king, Sigifrid, Paulus states that it was expected that he "*adveniat manibus post terga revinctis, Nec illi auxilio Thonar et Waten erunt*" ("should come with his hands bound behind his back, nor will Þonar or Waten protect him") (Paulus Diaconus, 1881 p. 52; translation from Shaw, 2002, p. 78). Here, a direct connection is made between Óðinn (and Þórr) and kingship in Denmark, but the statement is naturally contextually problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, as Shaw and Neff both argue, the peculiar form of the name "Waten" was not a proper Danish form. This raises several questions. Both have concluded that Paulus himself had personal no knowledge of whether the Danes actually worshiped Óðinn or not, and was simply following a simple formula relating to contemporary clerical concepts of Old Norse paganism, using the names of Þórr and Óðinn as a means of mocking Sigifrid's religion (Paulus Diaconus, 1881; for commentary see Shaw, 2002, pp. 78-79, citing Neff, 1908). There is, however, some reason to question the linguistic basis of their argument. There is, of course, scant evidence of writing in Denmark dating to the eighth and ninth centuries, apart from runic inscriptions (such as the one described above from Ribe). There thus no proof that there was consistency of pronunciation, or any set rules about how sound should be translated into runes. Indeed, even if there was a consistent "Danish" spelling of Óðinn's name, it is questionable whether Paulus was aware of the proper form, even if he was aware that the Danish king worshiped the god. He may well have heard Óðinn's name

in a variety of dialects, something perhaps reflected in the two forms he uses for the name in his history of the Langobards (see above). Finally, over and above the fact that he is quoting someone else, it should be remembered that Paulus was not writing for the Danes (or attempting to echo Danish rules of pronunciation), but rather for a courtlier Frankish, Christian milieu.

That said, there is reason to accept Shaw's overall assessment that the naming of Óðinn and Þórr in this context could be seen as a formula. As noted above, there is no evidence of any connection having existed between Þórr and the new kingship in Denmark. The Ribe skull fragment noted above nonetheless underlines that both gods were known in Denmark at this time.¹⁴⁰

6.2. The Place-Name Evidence for Óðinn

We now have enough early, verifiable evidence for the existence of Óðinn to begin to apply theophoric place-name evidence for Óðinn to the data thus far provided. As a whole, place-names are a large and compelling body of evidence for the existence and distribution of a cult of a deity (Brink, 2007, p. 106). While there is good reason to add place-name data to the framework so far assembled with regard to the evidence for Óðinn-worship, it is nonetheless necessary to bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of such evidence.

Essentially, place-names are linguistic sources, the etymologies and backgrounds of which can sometimes be disputed. Each place-name has its own long history, but is rarely if ever accompanied by an original story explaining when or why a specific place acquired the

¹⁴⁰ The origins and dating of the use of Óðinn's name for Wednesday [*Óðinsdagr*] deserve some comment, albeit as a side note, because some researchers have used it as evidence for equating Óðinn with Mercury (whose day among the Romans equates with Wednesday). The origins and dating of the Germanic names for the theophoric days of the week have long been a subject of much debate among researchers. Traditionally, the most commonly accepted dating for the adoption of the Roman weekly calendar by the continental Germanic people, albeit with Germanic translations is the fourth century (for example, see Simek, 2007, p. 174; and Nordberg, 2006, pp. 30-32). In short, the reckoning for this dating was that Roman weekdays named after Roman deities must have been transferred from pagan Romans to Germanic heathens who replaced them with their own Germanic equivalents. Recently, Philip Shaw has cast serious doubt on this dating, pointing out that votive stones among the heathen Germans in the Rhine area during the Roman Iron Age have demonstrated extreme heterogeny. They regularly equate numerous local deities to the Roman gods such as Mercury (although no cognate for Óðinn ever appears on a votive stone, let alone equated with Mercury). Shaw concludes that it would be surprising indeed if among such heterogenous groups who often equated multiple, regional deities with Mercury, they were somehow able to agree to do so with Óðinn in the context of naming a weekday. He concludes: "The earliest evidence for equations of the great gods with Graeco-Roman deities survives from the Anglo-Saxon, Columbanian and Frankish intellectual powerhouses that were instrumental in the Christianization of much of north-western Europe. It would not be particularly surprising to find that a theophoric week, which originally developed as part of Christian scholarly engagement with the classical past, became so much part of Christian English and Frankish language and culture that it spread to other groups through interactions with the Franks and Anglo-Saxons" (Shaw, 2007, p. 400).

name in question. Numerous explanatory legends exist, as can be seen in *Landnámabók*,¹⁴¹ but few of these can be trusted. It can thus be difficult to tell how old or reliable a place-name actually is, especially considering the fact that the earliest evidence is often found in more recent maps or written accounts. While they often originate in pre-historic societies, this is not always the case. Many place-names in Scandinavia that are apparently theophoric were actually named well after the conversion (Vikstrand, 2001, pp. 31-32, 130). There is thus need to take care, and ideally assemble supplementary data. As has been noted with regard to Tissø (see Chapter 5.3.3), it is difficult to say for certain if, when, or for how long a deity was worshiped at a specific place, without additional evidence. In spite of this, when viewed over large areas, the distribution and concentrations of place-names involving the names of particular gods can be very telling, providing a strong implication that the cult of this particular deity did exist in the region in question (Brink, 2007, pp. 107-109). The section that follows will thus focus on the general distribution of those theophoric place-names in Scandinavia which researchers are most certain relate to the worship of Óðinn.

6.2.1 The Trustworthiness of Mapping

The maps provided in this thesis are taken from Stefan Brink's 2007 article, "How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?", and are currently accepted by most modern researchers. They also form the basis of the online theophoric maps provided by the "Pre-Christian Religions of the North" (PCRN) online database.¹⁴² Many of the details used in the conclusion of this subchapter are thus based on those given in Brink's article. They are accompanied by my own observations based on the maps provided by the website, and are supplemented with more general observations given by Per Vikstrand, whose comprehensive book, *Gudarnas platser. Förkristna sakrala ortnamn i Mälarskapskapen* (2001), specifically covers the place-names found in the Mälaren area in Sweden (and is thus only of limited use here, since the thesis covers a much wider territory in southern Scandinavia).

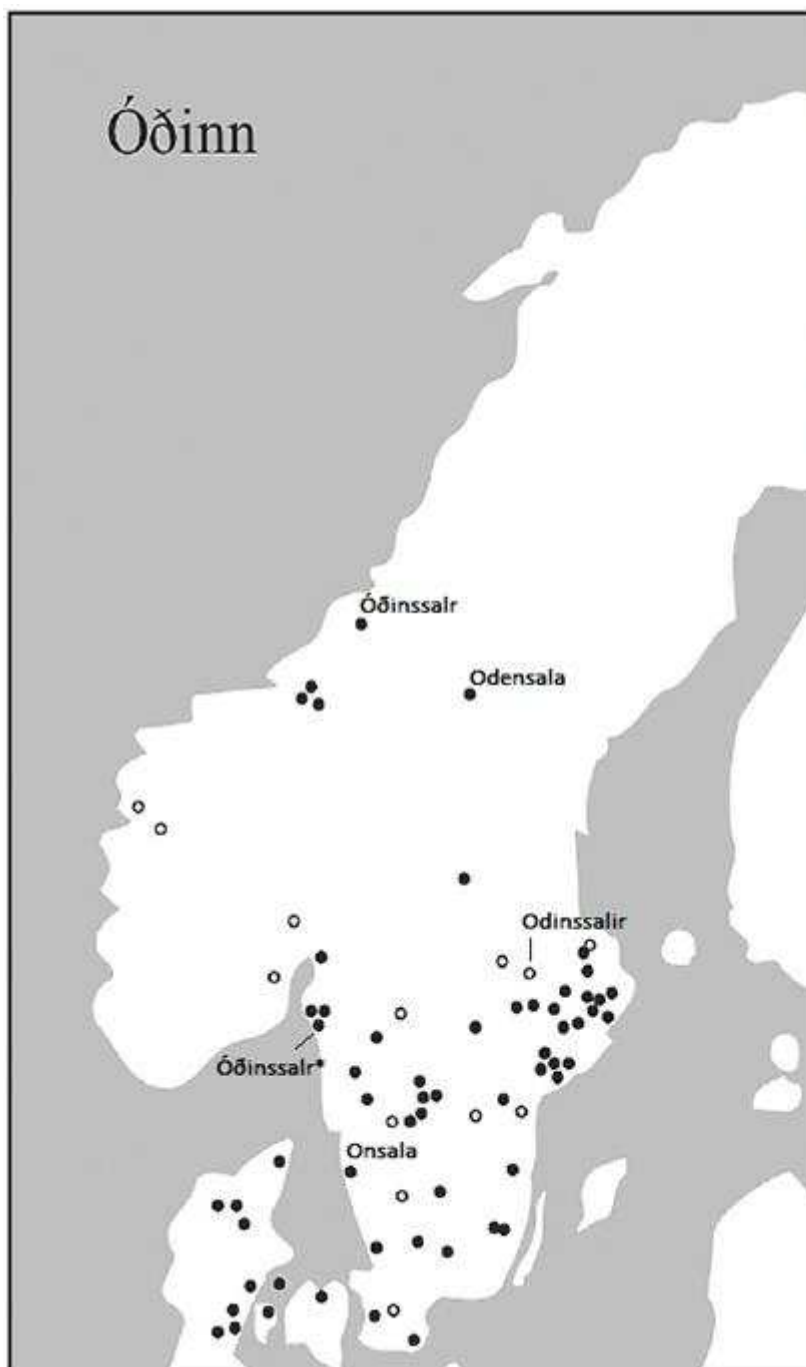
It is nonetheless important to remember that Brink's maps only contain place-names which he was absolutely certain were theophoric, and could be dated to the early medieval period. As a result, they do not include as many locations as they potentially could, and omit a

¹⁴¹ See, for example, *Landnámabók*, 1968, pp. 124-125, "Þeir lendu þar inn frá í váginn, er Þórólfr kallaði Hofsvág; þar reisti hann bæ sinn ok gerði þar hof mikit ok helgaði Þór; þar heita nú Hofstaðir. Fjórðrinn var þá byggðr lítt eða ekki."

¹⁴² PCRN, [06-05-2017].

number of minor place-names for natural features such as fields which contain theophoric elements, and a number of others, the names of which are uncertain. While this makes for a smaller body of evidence than it would otherwise contain, it is worth bearing in mind that according to Brink, the omitted evidence falls into the same pattern of distribution (Brink, 2007, p.109). For the reasons given above, Brink's maps can be treated with some confidence.

6.2.2 The Theophoric Place-Name Evidence Relating to Óðinn: Maps



Map 1: The distribution of theophoric place-names connected to Óðinn (from Brink, 2007, p. 112). The open circles are names that are less certain, according to Brink. Here all sites listed by Brink in which Óðinn is connected to a *-salr* (hall) are named (see further below).



Map 2: The distribution of theophoric place-names relating to the various main Nordic gods in Scandinavia.
 Green: Óðinn
 Red: Þórr
 Blue: Njörðr
 Yellow: Freyr
 (from *PCRN*, [2017-05-06]. The map is still under construction, and lacks many place-names from regions outside of Scandinavia).

6.2.3 Theophoric Place-Names in Scandinavia: Results

As the maps given above demonstrate, the distribution of theophoric place-names connected to Óðinn in Scandinavia shows a clear prominence throughout Denmark and in southern/central Sweden (in those areas in which most of the halls discussed in Chapter 5 have been found). The majority of these place-names connected to Óðinn are nonetheless found in Sweden, with a marked concentration being scattered around the Lake Mälaren and Uppland areas, but they also occur throughout southern Sweden, and particularly Scania. In Denmark, the Óðinn names are more evenly distributed, and are also found further southward on the continent. They also occur throughout southern and central England (Chaney, 1970, p. 36; see also Dickens, 1933, 154-155; Stenton, 2001, 99-100; and Wilson, 1992, pp. 11-12). As the maps show, they are comparatively very few in Norway, and severely lacking throughout western Norway in particular. They are also lacking in Iceland.

It is revealing to compare these findings with the distribution of place-names associated with the other most well-known deities. Þórr place-names are clearly comparatively widespread throughout all of Scandinavia, while Freyr place-names appear mainly in central Sweden, the Mälaren area, and westward, as well as here and there throughout central Norway. Njǫrðr meanwhile appears primarily throughout western Norway and central Sweden, where, according to Brink, they appear in distinct regional groupings (Brink, 2007, 119). Those place names associated with Týr are not included on the map, but appear almost exclusively in Denmark, save for one possible exception in Western Norway (Brink, 2007, p. 121). The implication of this is that place-names containing the element *týr* were a local phenomenon. Compared to those place-names related to other deities, those relating to Óðinn's have a clear prominence in southern Scandinavia. They also have a pattern that seems unique to him alone.

Also of interest for the present discussion is that a careful examination of all the theophoric place-names given on the PCRN map reveals that of all the deities associated with theophoric place names in Scandinavia, Óðinn is the only one to have his name attached to a word connected to the concept of "the hall", in the shape of the ON word element *salr*. Following Brink's list of the five Óðinssalir place-names found in Scandinavia, these have been placed on Map 1. Here, the Óðinssalr place-name marked with a "*" indicate a place-name that appears in early records but which has since been lost (renamed to Huseby) (Brink, 2007, p. 113). It is interesting to note the way in which these names appear scattered over a wide range of territory, in central and northern Sweden and southwestern Sweden (in Halland), and in both

in south-eastern (Østfold) and north-western Norway, close to the Hlaðir jarls of Trondheim, who were also associated with Óðinn as shown above (see Chapter 6.1.2).

One of the more interesting locations is Odensala in northern Sweden, where the place-name is found on the edge of a lake containing the islands of Frösö (lit. “Freyr’s island”), and Norderö (lit. “Njörðr’s Island”). Here perhaps we can see the remnants of a local complex involving all three gods. It is noteworthy that while the place-names in question connect both Njörðr and Freyr to the natural landscape, Óðinn is connected to a man-made building, a hall.

It should be noted that few of the locations in question have not been properly searched for archaeological remains. It is not known for certain whether large halls ever stood at these locations (as is the case with Uppsala in Sweden). However, at both Uppsala and Skíringssalr in Huseby, Norway, two places with the suffix *-salr*, large halls have recently been discovered (Brink, 2007b, pp. 53-64). Brink has expressed an expectation of similar finds coming to light at the various *Óðinssalr* locations (Brink 2007b, p. 61). The key feature of these place-names is nonetheless that they demonstrate Óðinn being directly conceptually related to real-world halls, as he is in the mythological world presented in *Snorra-Edda* and some of the Eddic poems (see Chapter 1 and 4.2.2).

6.2.4 The Óðinn Place-Names: Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence relating to Óðinn place-names, it can thus be stated with some certainty that the cult of Óðinn was most prevalent in southern Scandinavia, and most particularly in the Mälaren area of Sweden and in Denmark. The evidence thus far in this Chapter also suggests that his cult moved from south to north, although Per Vikstrand has contested this idea, observing that Óðinn is actually found more frequently in place-names in the northern regions of Uppland than place-names in Västergötland (Vikstrand, 2001, p. 139). Vikstrand’s research however, was very locally focused, limiting itself only to the Uppland region. Viewing Scandinavia as a whole, it seems quite evident that even though some southerly areas lack Óðinn place-names, on the whole, his cult was based in south and central Scandinavia (with little evidence being found in Norway).

With regard to that point, I suggest that when looking at these place-names, if they are related to a cult that was perpetuated and maintained by an elite milieu, these would be a people who had the means to travel very far and maintain a network of contacts over long distances, but only in so-much as political and personal connections allowed for it. They would have

operated out of centers of power, with spheres of varying influence. It can be expected then, that the dispersal of place-names associated with a cult that was fostered within that milieu would be unevenly distributed geographically. If we were to see an even spread of place-names, that would more likely indicate a deity that was widely worshiped among the common populace, extending from community to community. This is exactly what we see with Þórr, for example. As such, we can say the wide ranging, yet sporadic locations in which Óðinn place-names are found can be seen as evidence of them being associated with limited groups of people who were mobile and had a far reaching network. Exactly the type of elite rulers described in Chapter 5.

6.3. Research into the Iconography of Óðinn

A number of images appear throughout the corpus of Iron Age Scandinavian physical culture whose features have resulted in researchers comparing them with, or identifying them with Óðinn. worth particular attention here is a motif-group comprising a number of horned figures (some with one eye), appearing on a variety of mediums, which have long been identified with Óðinn by a number of researchers.¹⁴³ Mikaela Helmbrecht recently constructed a comprehensive overview of the images as a group, with the conclusion that a connection must

¹⁴³The amount of literature that has come about as a result of attempts to identify Óðinn in Iron Age imagery is too large to detail here. Some individual images appearing in the late Viking Age could be argued to depict Óðinn, the fact that they are often dated to a point which is later than this thesis regards, and due to the fact that they often do not fall into a motif-group which can give insight, they will not be regarded here. Perhaps the best example of a probable Óðinn figure which will be disregarded in this case study, is the enthroned figure flanked by two birds, mentioned in a footnote in Chapter 5.3.4. Other images which have frequently been identified as Óðinn, but are much less convincing. One such image is the figure of a figure riding an “eight-legged horse” on the Alskog Tjängvide I and Ardre Kyrka VIII picture stones on Gotland (Hejdström, 2012, p. 20) In short, the horse could be running, and as Helmbrecht writes, “a drinking horn does not make a *valkyrie*, a spear does not make Odin – these attributes may just mark the figures as male or female” (Helmbrecht, 2012, p. 86) Various bracteates have tentatively been interpreted as representing Óðinn over the years and also deserve mention because of their frequent mention here, and because of the impact the research on them has had. Karl Hauck, the most prominent scholar to make such arguments, in fact went as far as arguing that most of the images on the Type A, B and C bracteates (for a review of these types, see Hauck, 1986, pp. 474-512) were representative of Óðinn. In his attempt to construct a coherent interpretive system out of the bracteate iconography, Hauck argued that the Type C bracteates, in particular, were pictorial equivalents to the myth related in the *Second Merseburg Charm* (see footnote in Chapter 5 above), and showed Óðinn healing the injured leg of a horse (Hauck, 1986, p. 487; 1998, p. 39). In the last twenty years, however, Hauck’s arguments for the figure on the bracteates representing Óðinn have faced considerable criticism. A comprehensive overview of Hauck’s research and of the criticism it has faced is provided by Nancy Wicker (2014, pp. 25-26). As Wicker shows, Hauck’s identifications are too problematic to be relied upon. If we disregard Hauck’s systemic interpretations of the bracteates as depicting Óðinn, they become a heterogeneous collection of items that depict a wide variety of images and image types (Wicker, 2014, p. 26). There is thus no trustworthy means of including the bracteate iconography in this review of Óðinnic iconography.

exist between these images and the figure of Óðinn (Helmbrecht, 2008, pp. 31-54). The same conclusion was also reached by Neil Price, who has argued that the horned figures with one eye can be placed alongside a variety of other items featuring an altered or damaged eye, including the Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde helmets, all of which, to his mind, also indicate Óðinn worship (N. Price, 2014, pp. 517-538). These images will be the center focus of this study, in which the aim is to focus on the nature, dating and distribution of these items to see whether there is reason to connect them to Óðinn, and if so, whether they add further weight to the evidence given above for the suggestion that the acceptance of Óðinn was related to the acceptance of new forms of rulership in southern Scandinavia.

6.3.1 Bird-Headed Terminals and Horned Figures

Images of figures wearing some kind of horned headdress are naturally not new (Coles, 2005, pp. 35, 64, 159). In Scandinavia alone, images of this kind appear as early as the Stone Age, and horned costumes were still being used by costumed Nordic guisers in the twentieth century (Gunnell 1995, pp. 98-117). Of course, this does not indicate that all of these images refer to a fixed concept that remained static throughout the several-thousand-year period over which they appear (over and above the fact that they must at some level have a reference to horned animals). On the contrary, as Helmbrecht argues, even if an image of this kind remains formally stable over time, there is a strong likelihood that its meaning for people would have varied in accordance with its immediate context (Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 33). As such, “horned figures” in general are not the main focus here, but rather the specific motif-group noted above, featuring figures in horned, or flat-bowed headdresses, which date to the Vendel era and Viking Age, and are found primarily in southern Scandinavia and eastern Anglo-Saxon England. It is noteworthy that the headdress in question often terminates in bird heads, and that (as Price underlines), the figure occasionally has an intentionally damaged or missing eye.

As noted above, Helmbrecht made a case study of the entire motif-group in 2008, using all of those images known to her, although some dozen or so additional figures have since been found (private e-mail from Helmbrecht, dated 2017-03-13). In her research, Helmbrecht makes a careful classification of these images within which she has identified six subgroups, based on dating, context, and the physical attributes of the items in question. She also provides a map, and a chart in which each of the individual objects is numbered, along with details of their find spot, the type of object they are, their iconographic descriptions, their dating, and their find

context. Because of the importance of these findings for the present thesis, a brief overview of Helmbrecht's subgroups will now be provided, along with image examples of each. Following the overview, various particular details will be addressed further.

Subgroup 1 (see figures 7 and 8) comprises of eight images, all dating to the Vendel period, which were found primarily in wealthy, warrior graves in eastern Scandinavia, mainly in and around Uppland, as well as in eastern Anglo-Saxon England, from areas known to have been in some contact with southern Scandinavia (see Chapter 5.2). One example comes from Germany. The images appear only on pressed sheet metal, or on a cast-die used for producing pressed sheet metal. They appear on helmets found at Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde (see further below), and on other parts of warrior gear (including a belt buckle). All of them depict "dancing" or running figures, sometimes in pairs (as on figure 8), wielding weapons. In seven of the eight images, the figures are wielding a pair of spears. The "horns" clearly form part of headgear worn by the figures, and in five of the eight images it is noteworthy that these horns end in a pair of bird heads (in one case this is unclear). Only one of the horned figures in this group is depicted as having one eye (that from Torslunda).

Subgroup 2 (see figures 9 and 10) of the horned figures comprises of only two images, both of which appear on helmets from Valsgärde dated to the seventh century. They depict a mounted warrior, riding into combat, behind which is a small figure, which Helmbrecht describes as a "helping figure". The figure in question, which seems to be standing on the back of the horse, is holding a spear in one hand and has clear terminals coming out of its head which end in bird heads. Helmbrecht describes the figure as either running or dancing behind the warrior (Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 34). It seems to me, however, that the figure is holding the shaft of the warrior's spear, as if to guide it. Based on this observation, these "helping figures" can be compared to other, almost identical images, which are found on the Sutton Hoo helmet, and on a gold disc brooch from Pliezhausen, Germany (figures 11 and 12), likewise dated to the early seventh century.¹⁴⁴

Subgroup 3 (see figures 13 and 14) consists of nine figures, found exclusively in southern Scandinavia, which appear on one possible brooch, three coins and two pendants, as well as the Oseberg tapestry from Norway (three images), all of which are dated to the Viking Age. The two brooches were found in women's graves. The same applies to the Oseberg

¹⁴⁴ Both the Sutton Hoo helmet and the Pliezhausen disc contain an almost identical scene to that portrayed on the Valsgärde helmets: a rider on a horse is trampling a fallen man. The warrior's spear is hoisted, and behind the rider is a little figure, posed like the helping figures from Valsgärde, which has one hand on the rider's spear. It should be stressed however, that the helping figures from both Pliezhausen and Sutton Hoo lack the horned helmet, and are holding a buckler or shield in place of their own spear (see figures 11 and 12).

tapestry which was found in the famous boat grave of a woman who clearly belonged to the upper milieu of society, and who possibly had a religious role within her milieu (N. Price, 2002, p. 159). The remaining pieces are stray finds or were discovered at settlements. Most of these figures seem to be standing, or walking, and most are carrying a staff or a pair of baton-shaped objects in one hand (as in figure 14, which offers obvious parallels to the images in *Subgroup 1*), and a weapon such as a sword in the other (in some cases, as in figure 13 it appears the figure is holding a sword in one hand, and the sheath to the sword in the other. The horns on the headgear of these figures either end as points, or as ambiguous knobs that could perhaps have originally represented birds' heads.

Subgroup 4 (see figures 15 and 16) consists of four objects found at settlement sites or stray finds in Scania, and Denmark, which date to the Vendel or early Viking Age, including one found near the hall and cult-house at Tissø, and likewise at Uppåkra. The objects in question are three-dimensional figurines or busts featuring a standing man with large bow-shaped horns, which clearly do not end in animal or bird heads. The shafts of these figures suggest that they were fixed to an object, but it is uncertain what their use was. It is worth noting that two of the objects seem to have once been holding something. Only one of the figures from this group, the figure from Uppåkra, is depicted as having one eye (see below and figure 15).

Subgroup 5 (see figure 17) is comprised of five objects which are very similar to those in *Subgroup 4*. The objects in question take the form of busts of the head and sometimes upper torso of a male figure, and appear to have been fixed onto another object. Unlike the figures in *Subgroup 4*, however, the horns on these figures end in clear, even elaborate bird heads (much like those in *Subgroups 1* and 6), the ends of which touch to form a complete ring. One of the objects from this group again is one-eyed (from Staraja Ladoga). The objects in question are all from the Vendel era and Viking Age, their dates ranging from the seventh century through to the ninth. They are found in southern Scandinavia, eastern England, and Russia (at Staraja Ladoga, a Scandinavian settlement: see further below), three of them in graves (one belonging to a woman), while the other two come from settlement sites.

The final *Subgroup 6* (see figure 18) is comprised of five objects representing a style of head that diverges somewhat from those so far mentioned. According to Helmsbrecht, these figures probably belong to a different motif, that of a "head with two flanking animals", which finds similarities throughout Scandinavia and Slavic regions (Helmsbrecht, 2008, p. 39). Two of the figures in question were found in graves (one belonging to a woman), while another one was found at a settlement site. Two were isolated finds. All of the objects were found in Southern and central Sweden and Denmark, and date primarily to the Vendel period, although

some come from the early Viking Age. The objects all consist of a human head flanked by two downturned birds' heads.

As noted above, it is clear that only three of the horned-figures described above are one-eyed (those from Torslunda, Uppåkra, and Staraja Ladoga), although Helmsbrecht mentions a further one-eyed, horned figure that will be discussed further below. As noted above, recent research by Neil Price has demonstrated that the motif of the "One Eye" needs to be considered in a wider context, since the motifs extend beyond the horned figures themselves. They are also found on other images connected to the same kind of warrior gear as that associated with many of the horned figures, including eye-guards found on the headgear worn by aristocratic warriors, as will be seen in connection with the Sutton Hoo helmet discussed further below (N. Price, 2014, pp. 517-538).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Unless otherwise referenced, I am basing my overview here on Neil Price's own investigation into the "One-Eye" motif: see N. Price, 2014, pp. 517-538.



Figure 7. An example from *Subgroup 1*. The "Torshälla Dancer", (from *THPW*, [07-05-2017]).

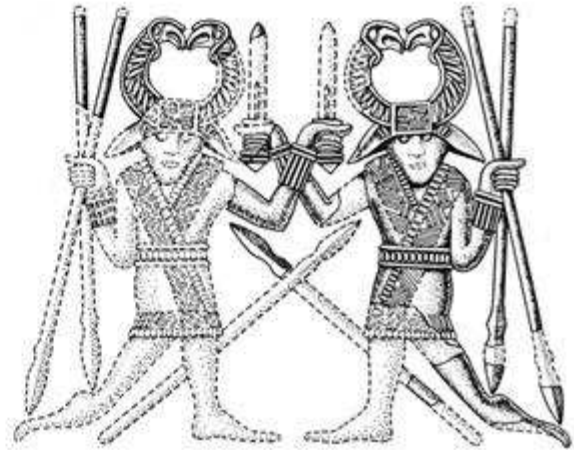


Figure 8. An example from *Subgroup 1*. "Twin Warriors" on the Sutton Hoo Helmet Plate, (from *Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, [07-05-2017]).



Figure 9. An example from *Subgroup 2*. A Valsgärde 7 helmet plate, (from *European Medieval Archaeology*, [07-05-2017]).



Figure 10. An example from *Subgroup 2*. A Valsgärde 8 helmet plate, (from *European Medieval Archaeology*, [07-05-2017]).



Figure 11. The Pliezhausen disc, (from *European Medieval Archaeology*, [07-05-2017]).

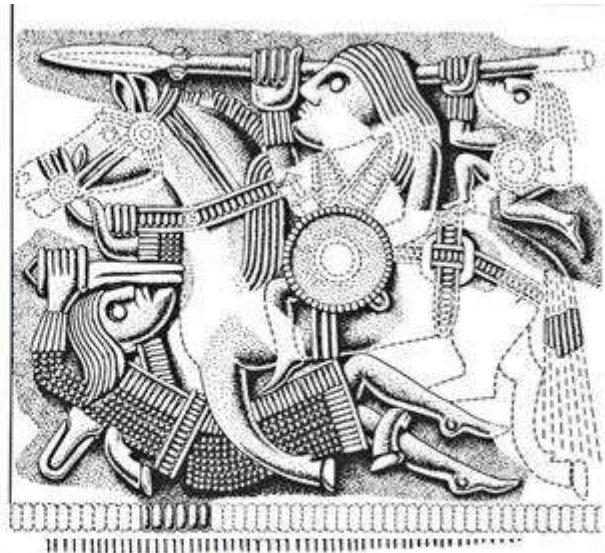


Figure 12. The "helping figure" from a Sutton Hoo helmet plate, (From *European Medieval Archaeology*, [07-05-2017]).



Figure 13. An example from *Subgroup 3*. A pendant from Birka, (from Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 37).



Figure 14. An example from *Subgroup 3*. A coin, find-spot unknown, (from Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 37).



Figure 15. An example from *Subgroup 4*. A figure from near the Uppåkra hall and cult-house, (from Helmbrecht, 2013, p. 23).



Figure 16. An example from *Subgroup 4*. A figure from near the Tissø hall and cult-house, (from Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 38).



Figure 17. An example from *Subgroup 5*. A figure from Staraja Ladoga, (from *Germanic Mythology*, [07-05-2017]).

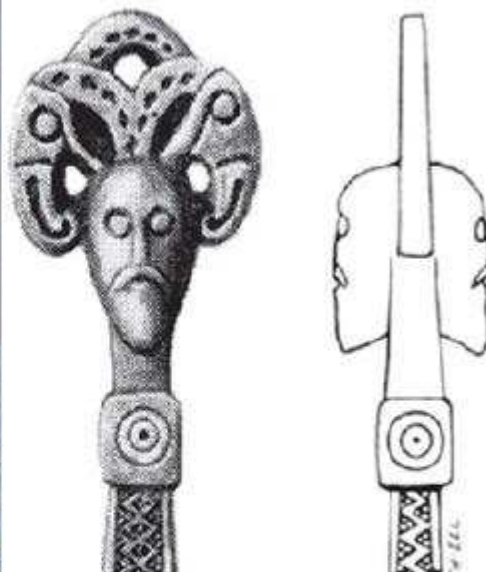


Figure 18. An example from *Subgroup 6*. A fragment of tweezers from Ihre, Gotland, (from Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 39).



Top right: Figure 19. Closeup of the “Torshunda Dancer”, (from Bruce-Mitford, 1974, plate 54c); *bottom:* Figure 20. Animal-headed crest on Valsgärde 7 helm, (from N. Price, 2014, p. 523); *top left:* Figure 21. Brow-ridge from near the Uppåkra cult-house, (from N. Price, 2014, p. 523); *middle left:* Figure 22. Eye-guard from near Lejre, (from N. Price, 2014, p. 524).



Figure 23. Sutton Hoo helmet, (from *The British Museum*, [07-05-2017]).

6.3.2 One-Eyed Figures

6.3.2.a One-Eyed Figures with Horns or Birds' Heads

For obvious reasons, not least relating to the fact that in medieval Icelandic literature Óðinn is often described as having one eye,¹⁴⁶ it is logical to focus a little more closely on those horned figures mentioned above which also have only one eye. These appear in the following contexts:

*The Torslunda Dancer (sixth-eighth century):*¹⁴⁷ This image appears on part of a sheet metal stamping matrix found from Torslunda, on the Swedish island of Öland. It is worth noting that the scene depicts a dancing, horned figure beside a second figure dressed in a wolf costume, the horns on the horned figure's head ending once again in two birds' heads. Using laser-scanning, scholars from the Archaeological Research Laboratory in Stockholm have conclusively demonstrated that the figure's right eye has been struck out with a square-tipped object, probably a chisel (see Arrhenius and Freij, 1992, pp. 76-81). What this means is that the image was originally manufactured with both eyes, and that someone intentionally stabbed out an eye after this occurred.

*The Staraja Ladoga Horned Figure (eighth-ninth century):*¹⁴⁸ This bronze figure which was probably designed to go on the end of a handle to an unknown object was found among a hoard of smith's tools at a Scandinavian settlement from Staraja Ladoga, in Russia, and has been dated to between 750 and 800. The handle represents a man's head, crowned with horns which terminate in bird's heads (Roesdahl and Wilson, 1992, p. 298). Its left eye had clearly been struck out with a sharp object (Price, 2014, p. 525).

*The Uppåkra Horned Figure (eighth-tenth century):*¹⁴⁹ This horned figure was found at Uppåkra, not far from the eyebrow ridge mentioned in Chapter 5.4.1 and discussed further below. The figurine in question has been dated to the ninth century and represents a standing man with horned terminals rising from his head. As noted above, since the horns are broken, it is unknown if they terminated in bird's heads or not. In this case, the figures' right eye has been depressed into a concave hole, while the left eye remained convex after its manufacturing (Bergqvist, 1999, pp. 119-21; Helmbrecht, 2008, pp. 35-43).

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, *Gylfagynning*, p. 17; *Skaldskaparmál*, p. 8; *Völuspá*, st. 28; *Völunga saga*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁷ This is the one-eyed figure mentioned in *Subgroup 1* above. See figures 7 and 19.

¹⁴⁸ This is the one-eyed figure mentioned in *Subgroup 5* above. See figure 17.

¹⁴⁹ This is the one-eyed figure mentioned in *Subgroup 4* above. See figure 15.

The Ribe Horned Pendant (eighth-tenth century). This small pendant was found at Ribe in Denmark, the same market settlement in which the skull fragment with the Óðinnic runic-inscription noted in Chapter 6.1 was found. The pendant is of a male head with a moustache and horned headgear. Here, the right eye is marred with a clear punch-mark from a sharp object. As with the others, this clearly occurred after the object was manufactured (Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 43).

6.3.2.b One-Eyed Figures Without Horns

As noted above, Price and others have suggested that several other one-eyed figures should be considered alongside those which have horned headdresses, so these will also be noted here:

The Valsgärde Helmet 7 Animal-Crest (seventh-eighth century). It is worth noting that the helmet found in Valsgärde burial 7 features a prominent crest which terminates in an animal head just over the brow of the face-guard. The animal's eyes are made from garnet. While the right eye is made of a light garnet and backed with gold-foil, the left eye was made with a dark garnet, and is not backed with a foil (a pattern which was repeated elsewhere: see below). The effect of the missing foil behind the garnet, and the use of a darker garnet, is that it causes one of the beast's eyes to shine much brighter than the other. The difference between the two eyes is stark and obvious, and, as will be discussed further below, must have been an intentional stylistic effect (see figure 20).

The Vendel Grave 12 Animal-Grip (seventh century). Among the finds at the boat burial at Vendel grave 12 was a shield, the grip of which terminates in an animal head. It is interesting to note that the animal head was given identical treatment to the one on the helmet crest from Valsgärde. In other words, the left eye is not backed with a gold foil, while the right eye is.

The Sutton Hoo Helmet Animal-Crest (seventh century). The Sutton Hoo helmet features a crest ending in an animal head, on which the garnet which forms the left eye lacks a foil backing, much like that from Valsgärde (see above).

The Elsfleth Buckle Mask (late sixth century). Here, the silver-gilt tongue to a buckle found at Elsfleth, in north-west Germany, is decorated with a mask-like face, on which gouge marks are clearly visible, leaving a jagged hole where the left eye had once been. The buckle belongs to a group of equipment found in warrior graves, such as Sutton Hoo (N. Price, 2014, p. 525).

The Lindby Figurine (seventh century). This is a small figurine of a standing man with a moustache and conical hat, found at Lindby, in Scania. Here, the figure's right eye is depicted as a simple line, as if closed, while the left eye is "open" (Abram, 2011, p. 8).

6.3.2.c The One-Eyed Masks

Perhaps most interesting of all in the present context is that evidence also exists of Iron-Age rulers or prominent aristocratic figures giving special attention to one eye on the facemask of their own ceremonial headgear. Either the masks of their helms would have been manufactured to give the impression that the wearer was one-eyed, or else altered as a means of emphasizing an eye. There is also evidence to suggest that rulers could have ritually deposited one of the oculars or eye-guards of their helm. These items add weight to the idea that the images discussed above (and especially those with a ritual context like the Torslunda helmet die and the processional images on the Oseberg tapestry) might depict a ruler utilizing the concept of being one-eyed in a ritualistic setting. In the very least, the implication is that the images represent a concept that could that on occasion be embodied by living, breathing members of society.

The Sutton Hoo Helm (early seventh century) (see figure 23). The main item in this group is the famous, mask-like ceremonial helmet found at Sutton Hoo in Suffolk, England, which came from a royal burial complex comprising of several mounds, one of which contained a ship-burial, dating to sometime around 625 (Bruce-Mitford, 1974, p. 24). The individual buried in the ship was undoubtedly a ruler. The nature of the artifacts, and not least the style of the helm and the plates, which, as noted above in Chapter 5.2.6 have close parallels to those found at Valsgärde, Vendel, and Torslunda in Sweden, make it clear that the figure in question belonged to the same elite milieu as that discussed in Chapters 5.2-5.4, which was taking an ever-increasing role in the Germanic world in the Age of Migrations, and particularly in southern Scandinavia.¹⁵⁰

The Sutton Hoo helm was made of sheet-iron with a neck guard, cheek guards, and a facemask. A prominent crest terminating in animal heads runs the crown of the helm from back to front, and part of the facemask is decorated with a flying animal or dragon. The body of the animal forms the nose of the mask, while its wings and tail form the brow ridges and

¹⁵⁰ There are so many similarities between the weapons and equipment found at Sutton Hoo and that found in sites like Valsgärde and Vendel (including the phenomena of the ship burial itself), that scholars have regularly debated whether the items found, and not least the ruler himself might have originated in Scandinavia rather than England. See further Bruce-Mitford, 1974, pp. 1-60; and Arwidsson, 1983, pp. 71-82.

moustache.¹⁵¹ The surface of the helm is covered with bronze plates like those also found on many of the Vendel and Valsgärde helms, which are decorated with elaborate patterns and symbolic scenes of figures dancing or fighting. Many of the panels on the Sutton Hoo helm are badly damaged, and only some of the images are recoverable. One of the panels in question already discussed above as belonging to *Subgroup 1*, depicts a pair of dancing figures wearing horned headgear terminating in pairs of birds' heads (figure 8). A second panel from the helmet, also mentioned above in relation to *Subgroup 2*, depicts a riding warrior holding a spear with a second, small figure "guiding" the spear from behind (figure 12; see also Bruce-Mitford, 1974, pp. 13, 14, 198-213).

Bearing in mind that fact that the helmet plates seem to make reference to Óðinnic figures, it is interesting to note that both of the eye openings of the mask are lined with garnets, and that that the garnets lining the left eye are curiously missing the gold-foil backings which are used on the right eye of the helm. As has been noted from an early point, this is particularly curious in the light of the fact that foil backings for garnets are found in almost all of the other garnet finds in the entire expansive Sutton Hoo collection (with one exception: see below) (see Bruce-Mitford, 1978, p. 169; and Marzinzik, 2007, pp. 29-30). There was obvious reason to consider further what the reason for the lack of gold foil behind the garnets of the left eye might be. As most scholars agree, the purpose of gold or silver backings behind garnets was to reflect light through the garnet and to allow the gem to shine brightly.¹⁵² Without gold backings, the garnets lining the left eye would have appeared dark and lusterless compared to those lining the right eye (not least in firelight). Indeed, when Price and Paul Mortimer tested a reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo helm, both outdoors in bright sunlight, and particularly within the firelight of reconstructed halls, they found that the eyes were starkly contrasted. According to Price, from his observation within the dim light of a hall, the mask appeared to be one-eyed, not least because in the darkness the real eyes of the wearer were not visible (Price, 2014, 522). In this context, it is also worth bearing in mind that the same approach was taken with the left eye of

¹⁵¹ The process of designing the nose and brow guards to look like an animal is once again not unique to Sutton Hoo. It also appears on the Vendel grave 14 helmet (Bruce-Mitford, 1974, plate 55; and Arrhenius & Freij, 1992, pp. 75-110).

¹⁵² Price sums up the importance of *cloisonne*-technique garnet-work as follows: "Although garnets can be quite bright, especially if cut thinly, when placed in this way against a solid background their lustre is substantially dimmed. Early medieval jewel-smiths solved this problem by inserting wafer-thin foils of gold, or occasionally silver, at the base of the cells into which the garnets were set. Stamped with a cross-hatched pattern, the foils reflected light back through the stone to produce the gorgeous red glow for which the Sutton Hoo regalia is known. The use of gold foils in this way is virtually universal in Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian *cloisonné* garnet jewelry, and Sutton Hoo is no exception" (N. Price, 2014, p. 521).

the animal crest on the helm. There is logical reason to consider a potential connection between such a helm and the objects that will be considered next.

Deposited Eye-Guards (see figures 21 and 22). As has been mentioned in Chapter 5.4.1, just outside of the cult-house at Uppåkra, a highly decorative eye-ridge was discovered which could well have belonged to a helmet very much like those from Sutton Hoo, Valsgärde, and Vendel. The eye-guard in question has been dated, as with the others, to the Vendel period (Helgesson 223). Given the location of the find, just south of the cult-house, and the spears and other military equipment ritually deposited nearby, Price has argued that this eye-ridge must have been taken off a helmet also been ritually deposited (Price, 2014, p.523).

It is noteworthy that the deposited eye-ridge has a parallel found at Gevninge, just north of Lejre in Denmark. Here, a metal detector discovered an entire right ocular ring, with a sculpted brow, which would have belonged to a helm much like the others discussed above. Like those noted above, it is dated to the Merovingian period. Based on the find context Christensen has similarly argued, based on the find context, that the ocular was ritually deposited (Christensen, 2002, p. 43).¹⁵³

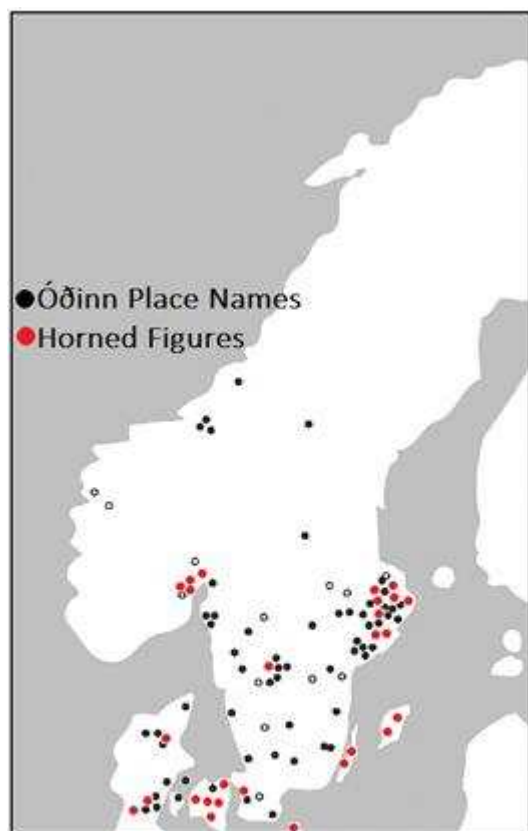
6.4. Evidence for The Worship of Óðinn in the Migration and Vendel Periods: Conclusion

The iconographic evidence presented in the last section, when considered alongside the fact that Óðinn in later times is described as being one-eyed, to have two birds that whispered into his ears, to use a spear, and to have connections with rulers and battle (see further Chapters 1 and 7.1.4) gives additional reason to consider that certain rulers were physically connecting themselves to the figure of Óðinn, either by occasionally taking on his role, and linking their

¹⁵³ Also deserving mention in this context is a bronze facemask from the Roman iron Age, found within a house foundation at Hellvi on the Swedish island of Gotland. This facemask was originally a Roman cavalry parade helmet apparently representing Alexander the Great (the second Roman parade helmet to be found in Scandinavia). The mask seems to have been deposited in the middle of the sixth century, a few hundred years after its creation. What makes it both unique and relevant in the present context is that at some point the original eyes of the mask were removed and replaced with new ones made of polished bronze and silver. These new eyes are unlikely to be Roman work, and are believed to have been manufactured by Swedish smiths. According to Price, the result would have been that the antique mask would have had piercing, gold and silver colored eyes (N. Price, 2014, p. 527). Of most interest here is that one of the eyes was missing from the mask when it was found, although it was later found in a later excavation in the same house. According to Price it, is likely that the mask hung from the roof-bearing pillar, and that one of its eyes was ritually removed and buried in the floor below. The Hellvi mask is particularly interesting because it is yet another example of Scandinavians emulating Romans, in a local context (see also Chapters 5.2.5-5.2.6).

lines to him, or by closely associating themselves with others who were taking on the role in person as part of rituals.

All the same, it is also worth remembering that Óðinn is never depicted in the extant written sources as dancing, of using crossed spears, or of wearing a horned helmet. The implications are that if this figure really is meant to be Óðinn, as many scholars have suggested, then the figure in question (who appears to have been recognizable and carried similar traits over a wide territory, ranging from Germany to Uppland to eastern Anglo-Saxon England) was somewhat different to the figure we know today from the works of Snorri Sturluson. All the same, a comparison between the distribution of horned figures in Scandinavia with the map of Óðinn place-names given earlier (see Map 1) certainly underlines that they are both found in similar environments, providing both further support for the idea that these figures might be associated with the figure of Óðinn (see Map 3). As stated above (in Chapter 6.2) no other deity



Map 3. The distribution of horned figures and theophoric place names connected to Óðinn.

shares the same distribution pattern in theophoric place-names as Óðinn, who is found in particular in the territory extending from Denmark to central Sweden and the Mälaren region, the same territory in which the new breed of elite ruler seems to have been establishing central, monumental halls with closely attached cult-houses during the later Roman Iron Age and the Age of Migrations.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, as has been shown above, objects that contain horned-figure imagery and one-eyed imagery have certainly been found near the cult-houses at Uppåkra and Tissø, and at and around Uppsala, and near Lejre. If, as implied above, these are in fact Óðinnic objects, then they demonstrate still further Óðinn's apparent connection to the emerging milieu of warrior rulers, which, as I have demonstrated, seem to have developed and operated out of these sites during the period in question.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ It can also be noted, as stated in Chapter 6.2, that Odinnic place-name extend southward into Germany, and are found in England, once again in those same regions in which the horned figures have been found.

¹⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that the Óðinnic place names in western Norway also appear in the Trondelag area, the region associated with the jarls of Hlaðir in the late Viking Age. As Steinsland has argued, these jarls seem to have stressed a personal affiliated with Óðinn (Steinsland, 2011, pp. 15-68). We have seen this also with the

All in all, the artifacts presented in this chapter strongly suggest something much more complex than just a mere association between Óðinn, horned helmets with bird-head terminals and one-eyed figures. As noted above, the “helping figures” depicted on the Sutton Hoo and Valsgärde helms are likely to be more symbolic, perhaps suggesting the idea of a supernatural Óðinn guiding the spear of a chosen warrior in combat. Others, however, seem to reflect ceremonies associated with the god, as in those images depicting pairs of weapon dancers, which imply the additional role of at least processions, or the horned figure beside a second figure in a wolf costume.¹⁵⁶ Such an idea is supported by the Sutton Hoo helmet which, as noted above, was obviously designed to make the wearer look one-eyed, in addition to being adorned with Óðinnic images (both the dancing figures and the helping figure). Indeed, the Valsgärde 7 helmet was designed in a similar fashion, with the same sequence of scenes on its panels and a one-eyed beast on its brow. Price has gone as far as to suggest that the motifs reflected in these helms are further evidence for an implied relationship between the warrior rulers and Óðinn, in which the ruler attempted to represent the war-god (Price, 2014, p. 533). He argues that the apparent sacrifice and deposition of the eye-ridge from Uppåkra and the ocular from Gevninge (which were both taken from helms) might seem to support this idea still further. As he says, if all of these motifs are in fact connected with Óðinn, they appear to be a part of a system of interconnected symbols, rituals and actions that run much deeper than being mere representations of a god, as we will see in the final chapter.

The dating of the items in question is also interesting in the present context. Price has noted that the one-eyed motif within a Germanic context seems to have begun around the sixth century, and Helmbrecht has observed the same with regard to the image of horned figures with bird terminals on the horns (Price, 20014, p. 532; and Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 34). As noted above (see Chapter 6.1), the earliest references to Óðinn appear on runic inscriptions from Germany roughly at the same time and shortly thereafter in Denmark. Clearly, as Helmsbrecht has noted, in the Migratory and Vendel eras, in southern Scandinavia, it seems clear that the Óðinnic symbolism was both lively and dynamic (Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 41). This, one might argue, is a strong indicator of it being a “fresh” concept, not yet rooted in tradition. With regard to context, it is noteworthy that it was found most particularly on the personal equipment of those people

Háleygjatál (6.1.2). The implication is that the establishment of these place names probably came about with this later group of rulers. Bearing in mind the earlier dating of the horned figures noted above, and the dating of the establishment of the Hlaðir jarls, it makes some sense that we should find no horned figures associated with such a late group.

¹⁵⁶ In fact, it has been suggested that the figure in a wolf costume might be another form of evidence for Óðinn-worship, through Óðinn’s potential connection with the *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*; see further, Gunnell, 2002; and Helmsbecht, 2008.

that seem to belong to the newly emerging elite warrior milieu. The implications are that as the figure of Óðinn was becoming prominent among this milieu, he was also becoming part of the way in which this elite constructed and demonstrated their identity.

A further implication of the evidence given in this chapter is that the figure of Óðinn seems to have originated in the south and moved north (as Snorri implies in both *Snorra-Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*, see Chapter 1), even though Snorri's euhemeristic accounts naturally deserve to be treated critically. While one has to be wary of trusting dating based on written materials, this seems evident in the way that the earliest references to Óðinn appear in an Alamannic context on the continent, only later appear more further north in Denmark. Certainly, the earliest Óðinnic images (if they are of Óðinn) also appear to have belonged to a milieu that had close contacts with the Alamanni, that is to say the new rulers of Anglo-Saxon England, and southern Scandinavia (Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 41). It is only later, in the Viking Age that the southern connection becomes lost, and they start appearing in an isolated, Scandinavian context.¹⁵⁷

As noted above, if the figure in question is Óðinn, then the Óðinn of the sixth and seventh century is clearly not the same as the Óðinn that appears in western Scandinavian contexts after the Viking Age. Even where similarities can be seen, as in the single eye, and the images of the birds, there is a good chance that they would have meant something subtly different at that time, and that this meaning varied from one context to another. Perhaps the reason the one-eyed images are not so overwhelmingly prevalent in the earlier period is because the concept of Óðinn as a one-eyed god was still developing across the area, and had not yet become firmly rooted in tradition, as has been noted earlier.

All in all, the evidence indicates that the Óðinn of the Migratory and Vendel periods was still a deity under construction and that he formed part of the evolving elite ideology. As Price states, the increasing number of symbols and narratives he was a part of as he took over from other gods might be best understood as a sort of web of connections, intersections and implications (Price, 2014, pp. 533-34). Indeed, it might be argued that the figure of Óðinn developed essentially within the embryonic theological undercurrent that encompassed emerging ideologies of a new elite warrior identity, a worldview which included concepts of ritual warfare, the rights implicit in rulership, a warrior paradise after death and even the

¹⁵⁷ This lack of continuation in the sharing of ideas with the inhabitants of Germany is in part a result of the arrival of Christianity further south, but also echoes that the reduction in trade contacts between Scandinavian rulers and their continental contacts, noted in Chapter 5.2.4. I have earlier described the period of the end of the Vendel period and the Viking Age as one in which Scandinavian rulers began to focus their trading efforts on a more local level.

suggestion that rulers should be seen as being close to gods, even going so far as to represent or even “host” a god (as had been the case with the Roman emperors and the god-chosen rulers of the Holy Roman Empire). As these concepts developed into ideals, the godhead that emerged to personify them and maintain them, was, it seems, Óðinn.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1.1 Thesis Summary

In the beginning of this thesis it was observed how medieval writers in western Scandinavia portrayed Óðinn as the *alfǫðr*, a deity who not only ruled over all of the other gods, but who was also the sovereign god of kings and their elite warriors. It was noted that the descriptions given of Óðinn in these texts are of comparatively limited value for those researchers trying to understand how he evolved to become the deity that they portray, or how he might have been perceived in earlier periods. This thesis has sought to contribute to providing answers to that question by considering the relationship between the evidence for worship of Óðinn and the evidence for the development of a warrior aristocracy which seems to have coincided with an apparent new social stratification within southern Scandinavian society.

Chapter 5 has demonstrated that evidence now exists for the development of a new aristocracy in southern Scandinavia, primarily between the fifth and seventh centuries (but continuing from earlier developments in the Roman Iron Age), as Scandinavian society developed from decentralized, “tribes” into larger kingdoms. It has also been noted that this new milieu seems to have formed part of a greater network of aristocracy which encompassed parts of England, and the continent, which included local pagan people like the Suebians, and fledgling Christian kingdoms such as those known among the Merovingians.¹⁵⁸ It has been noted that this network was heavily influenced ideologically by the Merovingians, who were in turn, the inheritors of the remains of institutions and ideologies previously developed in the Roman Empire. It has also been underlined that this newly emergent milieu in Scandinavia centered around warrior rulers, their families and their chosen *lið*: retinues of skilled warriors (see also Chapter 4.2). As noted in the chapter, these rulers seem to have demonstrated and increased their own power in part by establishing monumental halls; by producing and controlling the production and trade of prestige crafts; and by constructing religious structures on and near their personal private property. It has also been noted that political and religious

¹⁵⁸ As such, this thesis provides further support for those earlier theories presented by other researchers who have already made similar suggestions, theories which have been reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

authority seem to have begun to shift away from other social spheres, away from the *þing* and away from earlier communal, natural worship sites to take new shape under the control of the ruler himself, something that meant that the authority of the new ruler would have become increasingly institutionalized. This, it is worth noting again, is in line with Sundqvist's ideas regarding the function of religion within rulership ideology, outlined in Chapter 3.2.3. The evidence provided in Chapter 6 indicates that within this newly emerging milieu, the figure of Óðinn appears to come to prominence, developed and eventually became codified.

7.1.2 Óðinn's Southern Roots

Another aspect that has been considered in the thesis is the idea that Óðinn was a god with southern roots that moved north. Chapter 5 has certainly demonstrated that a number of ideological concepts that were taken up amongst the developing Scandinavian aristocracy were southern in origin. For example, it was suggested that the large central hall, which we might say formed the ideological and cosmic centerpiece of the Vendel and Viking Age rulers, was something that in many ways developed from the Roman *basilica*. Furthermore, it has also been argued in Chapter 5.2.6 that the military and political models through which warrior rulers bound vassals to themselves by means of a system of contractual obligations was originally developed among the Merovingian inheritors on the basis of a collapsing Roman system. These political models would become part of the foundation of rulership ideology in Scandinavia.

It seems that many objects that belonged to the material culture created within this milieu further demonstrate this same pattern of syncretism in a physical form. The objects in question often seem to be derived either from something that originated in Rome, or from among the Merovingians, and then adopted by Scandinavian elites, among whom the objects in question were synthesized into something that reflects local, Scandinavian motifs. Such objects thus show Roman/Merovingian concepts being transmitted into a Scandinavian cultural context. It is perhaps most clearly seen in the Migration-era bracteates, which were modelled on Roman medallions. In addition to their more obvious cosmetic borrowings, these objects probably also reflect a transmission of Roman ceremonial concepts (see further Chapter 5.2.5). The same kind of adaption can be seen in the reproduction of Frankish swords, which were developed originally among the Merovingians and later reproduced in Swedish smithies (also see Chapter 5.2.5). It can also be seen in the helms from Vendel, Valsgärde, and Sutton Hoo (see Chapters 5.2.5 and 6.3) which not only have roots in Roman cavalry and officer helms

from earlier centuries, but also feature iconography that seems to have been connected their wearers with Óðinn directly.

Throughout this thesis, material remains and ideological concepts belonging to the same milieu that developed Óðinn as a figurehead have been shown to exhibit a recurring pattern in which they originated in a southern context, and made their way north, where they were adapted to fit local concepts. It is reasonable to suggest that the same process occurred with the figure of Óðinn. Indeed, as Chapter 6 has shown, the direct evidence for Óðinn also indicates a south to north trajectory. The evidence in this thesis certainly supports the idea of a southern origin for many of the aspects of Óðinn.

It is worth mentioning here however, that, as Chapter 2 has indicated, when discussing religion (and especially ethnic religions: see Chapter 2.1.2), we are discussing changing, often syncretic concepts. When we discuss “Óðinn” (or one of the linguistic cognates of his name), we are thus discussing a changing concept, not an actual stable “figure”. While a conceptual figure may be named “Óðinn” (or one of the linguistic cognates) in a certain place or time, that figure might be hardly recognizable as the Óðinn we meet later in Snorri’s works or in Eddic poetry. Indeed, the figure must have initially existed in multiple versions among multiple groups of people, changing over time around a certain shared core of features. Various features now associated with the figure may well have existed as independent concepts, at earlier points being associated elsewhere with other deities, rulers, or folk heroes. They might have arisen from within the realm of law, out of superstition or as a social ideal, long before they ultimately compounded onto a figure named Óðinn. We often forget that the image given by Snorri and/or the Eddic poems is actually a tapestry made up numerous nebulous and multifaceted threads, some of which were many hundreds of years old before they are written down (while others are probably much younger).¹⁵⁹ It is likely that many of these ideological, ritual, and cosmic threads have roots in the imperial world of Rome, and the courts of the Merovingians, and were later synthesized into something “new” in the halls of the dynamic, new warrior aristocracy that was evolving in the central places of southern Scandinavia.

¹⁵⁹ For example, while Óðinn’s connection to war might be very old and widespread, his role as god of poetry might be something that developed more recently and in western Scandinavia. These examples are postulated simply to illustrate the greater point.

7.1.3 The Role of Óðinn

There is good reason to postulate as to *why* Óðinn should have come to develop into the patron of rulers and their *lið*. The figure of Óðinn that we are dealing with here appears to have been created by a people, class or social group who had ideological and cultural connections to the aristocratic worlds of Rome and the Merovingians, a group that seems to have desired to create and maintain their own identity and underline their differences from local populations over whom they ruled. They also naturally sought to find ways of validating their authority as a means of underlining their right to govern these people. It would have been very difficult for the new type of ruler that was gradually taking over smaller local tribes or clans to establish and maintain his new ideology in the eyes of those he had vanquished, people who may have had their own gods who were directly linked to the landscape. Such local deities would have been heavily rooted in local, well understood traditions based around maintaining an older social order. Taking up the Christian god worshipped by the Romans and Merovingians might have been too much of a leap, and incompatible with the beliefs of the locals on whom the new Scandinavian rulers based their livelihood. Such a move would also have thrust these rulers within the political arena of Christian Europe (ruled by the Church of Rome), resulting in a potential loss of autonomy. The natural alternative was to allow a god to develop within their own halls who was free enough from widespread local tradition for him to be adapted to their own emerging ideology (which, as shown, were in many ways drawn from the south and west) but also contextually compatible with the local, social, ideological, and cosmic framework. (We may even be dealing with a god that had earlier been adopted by the Germanic tribal war bands that had wandered into the south at the time of the fall of Rome.)

As noted above, this new aristocratic network was expanding to cover large areas of territory, and yet seems to have simultaneously established a shared “society” amongst the various centers within an otherwise heterogenous Scandinavian landscape with similar values and trading link. The individual rulers then drew young men to serve as warriors for them from various communities scattered about within their realms. In the courts and armies of these new rulers, individuals from different areas with their own local traditions and gods came together in groups that resembled a new form of pseudo-family, each with its own shared *alfqðr* god, living together beneath the roof of the monumental hall of their ruler. This was a realm of elites, in which warriors built up and showed their prestige, and where exotic goods and wealth were circulated and were consumed. This was not meant to be the world of the common man. The

archaeological remains examined in Chapter 5 show that these aristocrats were increasingly interested in demonstrating just how elite they were, while simultaneously trying to build up and maintain their own identity.

Chapter 4.2.2 noted Andreas Nordberg's argument that Valhøll developed as a macrocosmic ideal that echoed and raised up the everyday life of the warrior rulers and their *lið*. The evidence from this thesis supports this idea. In line with this argument, Terry Gunnell and Neil Price have both suggested that rulers appear to have "role-played" Óðinn in various contexts (see further the references in Chapters 4.2.3 and 6.3.4). It stands to reason that within this setting in which the ruler was already taking on the role of the "father" within the fictive kinship of his *lið* of men, a deity would have developed that would have embodied the same concept with regard to the local gods of his followers. If Valhøll represented the cosmic version of the aristocratic hall, Óðinn came to develop into a cosmic "father", ruling over the kings who came to Valhøll, as kings ruled over their own chosen warriors and smaller chieftains.

This macrocosmic/microcosmic paradigm might help explain in part how and why Óðinn began to take on the role of father of the gods, who, Snorri says, "þjóna honum öll svá sem börn föður" (*Gylfagynning*, p. 21). Men came to the hall of the ruler to become a part of his *lið* and brought their own customs, beliefs and gods with them. Within that hall, however, and within that fictive family, these men gathered around their ruler like sons to a father figure. That father figure's authority was then legitimized by the elite god, Óðinn. It makes natural sense that conceptually, the gods the warriors brought with them would come to be perceived likewise as being "beneath" the mighty, sovereign father god, Óðinn. Eventually some of the attributes of these local gods would become his, their cosmic lineages and roles shifting towards one in which Óðinn is the *alföður*, whom they serve as their warriors do the sovereign king. This seems a natural progression within the social parameters which various scholars such as Michael Enright, Andreas Nordberg, and Frands Herschend have established as having existed within the elite halls (as has been highlighted in Chapters 4.2 and 5.3).

7.1.4 Óðinn's Continuity and Change

Returning to the portrayal of Óðinn in later medieval Icelandic texts: As has been noted in the opening chapter, Snorri presents us with the image of an “*alfǫðr*” who rules over all of the other gods, and helped create the world, and humankind; a god of wisdom. According to Eddic poetry, this was a god who sacrificed himself to himself and gave one of his eyes for knowledge. According to Snorri, the Eddic poems and skaldic poetry, this was a deity who was associated strongly with poetry, and is described by Snorri as speaking in rhyme and who is heralded by the skalds as the master of the craft (*Ynglinga saga*, p. 17; *Skáldskaparmál*, pp. 4-5). Óðinn was said to be a god of runes and magic, who practiced *seiðr* (*Lokasenna* st. 24; *Ynglinga saga*, p. 17; see also N. Price, 2002), and a wandering outsider. He was also said to be a god of war, who decided victory or defeat, sometimes simply because he wished to take dead warriors into his own army. The hurling of a spear over an enemy implied you were giving them to him.¹⁶⁰ Most important of all, Óðinn is portrayed as the god of kings, to whose hall even unwilling rulers like King Hákon *góði* were fated to go after death.

The Óðinn that we see in the earlier data from the Migration and Vendel eras examined in Chapter 6.1 shares a number of these later features. He seems to have been a god associated with kings, the elite, war, and the bestowal of victory. These, I would suggest, are his primary features which continue down into the later Icelandic sources. In that regard, these features show a strong degree of continuity in time and space.

Other features, however, seem to have developed at some point in between these two periods. For example, it is uncertain how old his connection with ravens, eagles and wolves (stressed in later works) is. The Vendel and Viking Age images of a man dressed in wolf skins advancing alongside a dancer with spears or swords and wearing a helmet with bird-head terminals (see Chapter 6.3) contain most of these elements, but they seem to be contextually different. Indeed, it is impossible to be certain whether the bird heads here are ravens or birds of prey, and it is noteworthy that the helmeted figures are never accompanied by actual wolves. One also notes that the Óðinn known from the Icelandic texts is never portrayed as dancing with weapons or wearing a horned helmet.

It might also be noted that while the iconographic Óðinnic figures from the Vendel period sometimes have one eye (see Chapter 6.3.2), this is not always the case. This suggests

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, *Völuspá*, st. 24: “Fleygði Óðinn ok í fólk um skaut”; see also *Styrbjarnar þáttur*, in *Flateyjarbók*, 1945, p. 148. “Sá seldi honum reysprotai hönd ok bað hann skjóta honum yfir lið Styrbjarnar, ok þat skyldi hann mæla ‘Óðinn á yör alla’”.

that like the concepts of information-gathering ravens and pet-wolves, this concept might have been still developing as an Óðinnic feature. Óðinn's association with alcohol is nonetheless possibly older in that it seems evident that drinking rituals were important to the elite milieu that worshipped him (see further Chapters 4.2 and 5.3), and, of course, we also have the description of a beer sacrifice from the *Vita Columbani* (see Chapter 6.1.2). The point at which Óðinn took on the role of a cosmic father-figure is, of course, uncertain, and can be based on little more than logical conjecture (as noted above).

All in all, the likelihood is that as the figure of Óðinn moved northward, deeper into Scandinavia, he took on new local concepts previously associated with other figures. Helmbrecht has argued that the dynamic, god of the Vendel era who was strongly associated with a male, warrior elite seems to have become more mainstream during the Viking Age. As Óðinn became rooted in tradition and cultural memory, becoming ever more widely known, it is probable that he moved into new contexts, including those related with the magical world of *seiðr* and foreknowledge previously associated more with the realm of women (see Chapter 6.3.4; see also Helmbrecht, 2008, p. 42). As Gunnell has pointed out, it was not unusual that Óðinn (and/or his wife) seems to have often taken over objects and spaces that originally belonged to other gods. Indeed, there is good reason to assume that some of his many names might have belonged originally to other gods (Gunnell, 2013, pp. 169-170).

It might be said that the data from this thesis adds weight to these theories of development, offering some explanation as to how the Óðinn of the sixth and seventh centuries might have come to develop into the old, one-eyed wandering god of later times, associated in particular with magic arcane knowledge and poetry, as the worship of Óðinn spread westward, into Norway, and particularly north into the Trondelag region during the early Viking Age. One naturally wonders what impact this process of movement between cultures would have had on the image of Óðinn.

7.1.5 Ascending the Steps to Hliðskjálf

This thesis has argued that Óðinn became prominent because he increasingly became a part of the way in which Migration and Vendel era aristocrats constructed and demonstrated their own identity. Certainly, Óðinn had societal and cosmic roles, such as war, from an early point, and it may be that various aspects of the earliest form of Óðinn are what gave him an early edge over any number of other deities. However, there is reason to believe that his primary role, and his importance, from an early point, was related to helping to create and maintain the identity and ideals of a new Scandinavian aristocracy. This theory is at odds with any notion of a “pantheon”, or the idea that gods each had a specific cosmic role within a given society. As Chapter 2 pointed out, religion is a system of rituals and traditions which in many ways impact upon the social dynamics of a given group of people. Deities could very well play the same role within a society. It seems likely that this is what we see with Óðinn.

As has been stressed often in the preceding chapters, Óðinn seems to have been a god of a particular milieu from an early point on in the Migration and Vendel eras. As that milieu seized ever more power, and as kingdoms expanded and began to develop towards statehood (see Chapters 2.2.3 and 5.2), it seems that Óðinn made a transition from being a symbol of social identity into one that legitimized sovereign power. As his worshippers increasingly institutionalized their authority (see Chapters 2.2.5, 4.2 and 5), and ruled over larger expanses of territory, he also seems to have begun to develop into a transnational god.

Terry Gunnell has argued that by worshipping Óðinn, a ruler no longer needed to depend on omens and prophecies, the taboos of local communal religions, or the interpretations of religious authorities. Wearing a one-eyed helm like that from Sutton Hoo, adorned in the imagery of his godhead, and possibly uttering words said to originate from the god himself, the ruler could literally transform himself into an image or manifestation of the god (Gunnell, 2013, p. 168). The skalds, essentially the media of the time, and the closest thing that an oral society has to a source of “doctrine”, simultaneously called Óðinn the ruler of the gods, thereby raising him above all other gods, just as the ruler wished to be seen as being greater than other rulers. If we think back to the paradigm of world religions versus communal religions noted in Chapter 2.1.2, Óðinn is a deity that does not fit well into either category. He appears to be a hybrid, something in between a centralized, doctrinal, transnational god, and a syncretic, adaptable, community-based figure, in a sense a stepping stone on the way to the eventual acceptance of Christianity.

Óðinn, ruling from his high seat in Valhöll, was in a sense the cosmic equivalent of the sovereign warlord. He was also, in many ways, a manifestation of the turbulent changes and transitions that southern Scandinavian society experienced during the second half of the first millennium. Just as the period in question witnessed a new type of warrior ruler rising to usurp the old tribal clan leaders, uprooting the social order and reshaping society around themselves as they took on an ever more sovereign position, the same thing seems to have taken place in Ásgarðr, Óðinn ascended the steps to Hliðskjálf to become to become the *alfǫðr* of the heathen Norse gods.

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